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# Imagining Albion: Fantasy, Enchantment and Belonging in Contemporary British Paganism

Helen Purcell BA (hons) MA

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Religious  
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## Abstract

Contemporary Pagans in Britain often describe their experience as new practitioners of this emerging religion as that of 'coming home'. This thesis examines cultural influences contributing to this sense of recognition, utilising the kinds of fantasy reading cited by Pagans as a lens, in order to focus upon key elements within Paganism that may offer explanation as to what that 'home' may be. These influences include the use of myth, fantasy literature, magic and connections with place and ancestry to produce individual and communal representations of belonging. Analysis of the research conducted results in the argument that the impetus connecting disparate enchanted arenas for Pagans is the imagining of community identities that can establish a sense of connection to an idealised multi-dimensional landscape often named as Albion. This place connects together both the primary and the secondary realms and all the persons that belong to it. Place is the integrating factor for Pagans within their enchanted worldview. Usage of Celtic and Norse mythologies is significant, as these stories enable the development of communities that root participants into this particular place. Fantasy literature, utilising myth, reinforces community while also inviting individual exploration of society, space and time. Myth and fantasy connect together past, present and future, to establish a sense of identity. Paganism in Britain represents desire for enchanted identity of place sourced in feelings of indigeneity and the imagining of 'coming home'.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis emerged from research undertaken to try to establish why contemporary Pagan practitioners in Britain often describe the feeling that they get upon first meeting other Pagans and being introduced to a religion they have not previously encountered, as a sense of ‘coming home’. The research stemmed from simple beginnings: a recognition that author Alan Garner had influenced my own personal spiritual development before I recognised that I was a Pagan. My initial intention was to examine the novels of Garner and other fantasy writers in order to establish the themes in these works that might have contributed to, or paralleled, the spiritual development of Pagans. This focus enabled the distillation of themes that are integral to the religious understanding and practice of Pagans. The research then developed into further examination of some of the themes that emerged, particularly around the importance of establishing a connection with the Spirit of Place, which was revealed to be a key integrating theme both in certain kinds of fantasy novels and in Pagan intent, and also an examination of the importance of imagining in the creation of this religion. Imagining a multi-dimensional space that lies both in the primary dimension and in others simultaneously, enables the development of a sense of community and belonging that provokes feelings of enchantment for Pagans.

My research with contemporary Pagans shows that they favour a certain type of fantasy literature, in particular that which utilises Celtic and Norse mythologies, shows an engagement with place, with ancestry, with magical practice and with the fluidity of time. It indicates that Paganism is a religion that seems largely to appeal to people who are white professionals. I set out to look at the potential links, or parallels, between fantasy texts and Paganism in order to contribute to the debate as to whether, as Weber

(1991a) suggested, the West has become disenchanted during the twentieth century due to conditions arising from modernity. I argue within this thesis that the themes in Garner's novels, in which he ties his own self-identity into his home landscape of Cheshire and into the history of his forbears, run in parallel with core themes in Paganism. I conclude that Pagans are attempting to forge a sense of collective identity which links into an idealised version of the landscape of Britain. This combines both the primary world and secondary supernatural worlds with imagined ancient histories, using myth, fantasy literature, and a conception of the cosmos as being a construct of multiple living connections, both human and other-than-human, to create an enchanted worldview. My contention is that the growth of this religion stems from the loss of certainties of self and cultural identities caused by the upheavals of modernity in Britain with the changing and complex effects of secularisation, Europeanisation, Americanisation, devolution and multiculturalism. The desire is to live within a religion that re-establishes or re-creates a sense of historic identity for this particular group of people. These are people looking for their roots, however neither that desire nor the seeking are necessarily explicit. Pagans have not markedly recognised that they are involved in such a process. My research and analysis have uncovered this underlying desire. I argue that the imagining of a connecting historic and enchanted identity of place offers a viewpoint on nation-ness and indigenising as a form of enchantment.

In Chapter Two I examine academic literature relating to ideas of disenchantment, enchantment, modernity and postmodernity, in order to establish a framework of thought relating to my thesis. I consider Weber's (1991a) original contention in which he outlined the potential for disenchantment to occur, and some of the contemporary responses to that from Bruce (2002), Davie (1994), and Partridge (2004), in order to situate the debate. Weber argues that disenchantment arises as a part

of intellectual development, which leads to a consequent rejection of the non-rational. I argue that the development of Paganism is an example of continuing enchantment. In this thesis I respond to Bruce's (2000) challenge that no academic examination has been made as to why the majority of New Age practitioners are what he describes as 'lily-white'. A major contention within this thesis is that Paganism is a religion that appeals particularly to practitioners that imagine their historic identity to stem from 'Celtic' and Anglo-Saxon communities because these older communities, idealised or not, represent the imagined cultural 'home' that they are seeking to find. I test out Partridge's (2004) contention that occultural enchantment in popular culture informs enchantment in everyday life, as this thesis is an examination of that argument in relation to fantasy texts, and I draw the conclusion that fantasy texts have been received as an arena of enchantment by some Pagans. I examine Latour's (1993) argument that the West has never been modern if that term is considered to represent strict categorisation and argue that Paganism represents a modern religion if modern is considered as a sphere of networks and hybridisation. Bauman's (1997) discussion of postmodernity as acting to restore re-enchantment to a disenchanted modern world by people who are habitual self-reflectors with a concern for clearing away false pretences is considered. I then address Appadurai's (1996) argument that the work of the imagination is a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity, arguing that imagination lies at the heart of the development of Paganism. I consider Anderson's (2006) argument that debates about nationalism struggle to explain why theories of the modern objective model of the nation-state view it as a recent construction but struggle to account for its subjective antiquity in the eyes of members of nations. I go on to offer the notion of enchantment of place as a response to this. Having engaged with major theorists in this chapter, I further respond to theorists in relation to specific topic areas in the following chapters.

In Chapter Three I outline the research methodology used to gain the data supporting this thesis, including participant observation, formal and informal interviews, examination of websites, online forums, and practitioner publications. I outline the theoretical framework within which I worked including the use of Flood's (1999) dialogic perspective and Geertz's (1973) evaluation of the importance of thick description. I consider the issues that faced me within the research, including ethical considerations towards Alan Garner, some of my Pagan respondents and myself, as I had to consider the problems engendered by my own emic status within the research. I also consider the potential effects upon the communities involved of the argument that I am making. I emphasise that my contention is not that the practitioners are attempting to construct a religion that is based on ethnicity, but on a desire for a particular cultural identity that is rooted in an imagined history for each individual and on a longing to belong to place, inducing a sense of indigeneity. By looking backwards to a time of pre-Christian Britain, Pagans are constructing an imagined identity that possibly does not hold relevance or resonance for contemporary Britons for whom that period may hold little or no attraction.

Chapter Four provides an introduction to contemporary Paganism in order to contextualise the argument that follows. It contains a description of practitioners and outlines some of the shared areas of belief. By examining some of the more recent activity within the Pagan community towards engagement with the wider community, such as the development of a prison and hospital visiting service, it contains a response to Bruce's (2002) criticism of alternative spiritualities that they do not have social significance, and I argue that these activities serve to refute that criticism. In this chapter I provide a more developed understanding of the concept of 'coming home'. The thesis widens out from this concept to examine why Pagans declare this feeling so



frequently. Pike's (2001) analysis of neopagan activity in the USA as a 'utopian community' establishes a background to the argument in this thesis that Paganism in Britain is an attempt to establish an imagined community, with a recognisable history (imagined or not) and link to Place that allows practitioners to overcome feelings of disconnection that may have occurred due to modern changes in Britain such as geographical dislocation from traditional communities.

In Chapter Five I consider fantasy texts and argue that imagination is key to understanding Pagan religiosity as Pagans imaginatively create a sacred place and utilise fantasy texts as part of this process. The texts they chose are particularly sited in real places. I examine what this sacred place is for them. I explain my choice of the word *imagined* rather than the word *invented* in describing this process. I contend that Pagans consider they are following a tradition. While such *tradition* may be intended to be inclusionary it may also act to exclude some. I use the early novels of Alan Garner to distil themes of similarity between them and the themes of Paganism, and briefly outline the novels particularly cited by Pagans for readers that may have not read his work. I examine Butler's (2006) argument that the presentation of an older version of Britain and its landscape is a key theme in Garner's work to argue that involvement with place is integral both to his work and to the imagining of a sacred arena for Pagans. I discuss the breadth of types of fantasy to make the point that Garner's work can be seen as part of the fantastic milieu (Kirby, 2013) and is representative of indigeneous fantasy as defined by Attebury (1992).

I use a respondent's comment that she looks for books that make the kind of spirituality that she would like to see in the world to shape the argument in Chapter Six. The fantasy texts that were cited by Pagan respondents are considered more broadly, as are some of the ones that were not, in order to differentiate significant features. I

consider Jackson's (1991) argument that fantasy is a literature of subversion, positing that the surrealist texts that she used to form her contention are not the ones cited by Pagans. Both Jackson and Sandner (2004) consider the texts cited by Pagans to be nostalgic and full of yearning for a lost past. I argue that, although these gentler feelings may draw Pagans to such texts, their use of them in imagining a sacred place and forging a religion is active and engaged, rather than passive and inert. I examine Olsen's (1987) argument regarding fantasy literature and whether such texts reveal postmodernist intent and I employ Curry's (2014) discussion that negative critical reaction to the novel *The Lord of the Rings* is often forged in response to a perception that the novel is anti-modernist, to argue that Pagans are not creating a postmodern religion. I argue that if considered in light of Latour's (1993) argument that modernism should be defined as a recognition of networks and hybridities then *The Lord of the Rings* can be viewed as modern and that Pagan imaginings of Albion might be viewed similarly. I examine different ways that interviewees have discussed their use of fantasy texts and conclude that fantasy texts are a place in themselves and also offer a liminal space beyond the mimetic (i.e. texts that mimic the everyday world). They are both bounded and boundless and in this sense they function for Pagans similarly to imagined Albion.

In Chapter Seven the importance of myth within Paganism is discussed. Myth is defined as meaning a *significant story* and the older Celtic and Norse mythologies and their meanings within different Pagan pathways are examined. I argue that these older mythologies are used to map out the particular histories, whether imagined or not, that Pagans choose to be associated with, and that myth assists in the formation of group identities. I contend that Druidry is constructed from the image of the idealised Celt, in itself a construct (Leerssen, 1996) and that Druidry is therefore a construct forged from

within another construct. Heathens consider their spirituality to be based in a genuine historical community and therefore to be differentiated from that of Pagans whose spirituality is perceived not to be so. I argue that Witches utilise myth stories as a way to establish personal empowerment. I consider some of the personal myths that Pagans draw upon to explain their own lives, create their own Life Stories (Linde, 1993), and establish their own self-identity. The use of the older mythologies is analysed as a means of creating a community, and establishing a link with the past.

In Chapter Eight I discuss the differences between the concepts of magic and enchantment in relation to Paganism, making three distinctions. Firstly I argue that magic is an empowering activity that contains greater importance in its usage to certain communities, and makes a contribution to an overall enchanted worldview. Secondly I argue that magicality is the sense of wonder that is induced through activities such as the practice of magic, but it also incorporates and recognises the other-than-human persons that occupy the secondary realm, that Pagans often describe as Otherworld. Finally, I contend that the combination of the practice of magic in the primary world of everyday experience and the recognition of and engagement with the secondary realm, integrated with a desire to belong to something larger and more meaningful – a sense of place and indigeneity – broadly constitutes the enchanted worldview of Paganism. I argue that essentially as the practice of magic is an activity that takes place in the primary world often following certain rules for that practice then it is a modern phenomenon; while magicality occurs in the secondary world, but both contribute to the enchanted worldview.

I discuss the concept of new animism as posited by Harvey (2005) in Chapter Nine and argue that Paganism represents an attempt to draw together the nature/culture

divide of modernity by fusing the ancient and the modern and all persons, and that in this worldview Britain represents the point of cohesion.

In Chapter Ten I consider what integrates the areas discussed in previous chapters which is a desire for rootedness in Place while simultaneously acknowledging unboundedness through the multi-dimensional aspect of the sacred landscape of Albion. I examine arguments from Yi-Tu Fuan (2009) about place and placelessness, consider Gellner's (2006) argument about the nation-state and Smith's (1986) discussion of the ethnic origin of nations. I use Anderson's (2006) contention that discussion of the nation-state as a modern objective entity fails to account for the intensity of loyalty to place and community, and the view of the nation as a thing of antiquity for its subjects. I offer the argument that connection to place is an enchantment in itself, and cannot therefore be accounted for in political frameworks of the disenchanted nation-state. I argue that Johnson's (2005) model of indigeneity is the more useful in considering Paganism and posit that Pagans are engaged in a process of self-reflexivity of the kind that Giddens (1991) has discussed, as part of a process of imagining a cultural identity sourced in the imagined place of Albion. I consider Hall's (2013) two models for viewing cultural identity and conclude that the second, seeing it as a process that encompasses difference, is more applicable to the development of Paganism. My overall conclusions are drawn together in Chapter Eleven. The power of the imagination is central to the creation of a religion for practitioners that experience enchantment from and within the arena between place and space. For Pagans, imagined Albion is a multi-dimensional arena whose coordinates in the primary world lie in Britain. Imagining a past from which the religion can be sourced provides practitioners with a meaningful sense of personal and cultural identity. In response to Bruce (2002) I argue that the intent of Paganism may be inclusionary of all beings, however the

cultural identity they are constructing, that is sourced from imagined histories of pre-Christian Britain, may act as exclusionary for those who imagine their cultural histories differently. I offer a definition of enchantment as a sense of awe towards something larger and more meaningful than the individual self, and extend this definition to encompass the enchantment of place and belonging, in response to Anderson's (2006) questioning of what it is that theories of the disenchanted nation-state are unable to account for – the willingness of millions of people to sacrifice self in the name of a nation – and Johnson's (2005) model of the indigenous that it is a presentation of a self-understanding that orients, and relates people to a particular place. I offer an explanation for Pagan declarations of 'coming home' to this religion, as I argue that each practitioner, utilising ideas and images that may have been gathered from the occultural and fantastic milieu, has imagined a personal vision of Albion, via engagements with popular culture and with one another, which makes it a recognisable and secure arena within which their sense of self-identity can be sited. I posit that Paganism represents an example of a phenomenon that can be examined more widely as a way of being both enchanted and modern.

## Chapter Two: Literature review

### **Situating the argument**

In order to situate the argument that follows in this thesis, it is useful to identify the various academic threads that provide context to the discussion. This thesis constructs an argument that lies at the heart of discussions on the effects of secularisation in the modern West, the effects of modernity, the work of the imagination, the effects of myth stories and fantasy literature on the development of a religion, the relevance of enchanted connection to place in understanding desire for belonging to nation, and the tensions that exist between the boundaried and the boundless, all of which in some way arise initially from Weber's prediction of disenchantment arising in the West. Predictions that the West has or will become disenchanted have been challenged in academia and are also challenged by the examination of Paganism in this thesis. Paganism, I will contend, is one arena of enchantment in Britain, among others, that draws from popular culture. The heart of this discussion on Paganism lies with imagination. Pagans are imagining a community that draws from two distinct bodies of substantive myth: Norse and Celtic; and also draws creatively on a certain type of fantasy literature in order for practitioners to construct a meaningful and multi-dimensional sense of identity that is linked to the place and places of Britain. During the thesis, theorists from a number of areas are therefore considered: those that discuss enchantment, re-enchantment and disenchantment, those that analyse fantasy literature, those that discuss the Pagan community and its meanings, theorists about myth and its role, and those that consider the process of indigeneity. Theories relating to the role of nationalism are considered, along with consideration of religion and place. Within this initial literature review I concentrate on some of the distinct areas of discussion

pertaining to the wider context of the thesis, and address more specific areas in the chapters that focus in on particulars of the discussion.

The wider context of the thesis stems from the word disenchantment as used by Max Weber in 1918 (1991a), when he described the processes of scientific rationalism and secularisation in the West as being accompanied by a process of disenchantment. One of the aims of this research was to examine the contemporary Pagan community in Britain to consider whether it represents a group of people who *do* experience a sense of enchantment and, if so, to give some definition as to what may engender that.

The arguments regarding these concepts of disenchantment and enchantment, hinge on considerations about the theoretical frameworks of modernity and postmodernity. If the conditions of modernity in Britain have been accompanied by declining Christian church attendance does this decline indicate that the growth of a secularised culture has led to disenchantment, and does that extend to all religions in Britain? Is Paganism one of them? Can Paganism be considered to be a modern religion? If enchantment is a condition that still occurs within this particular community then what factors may stimulate and maintain it?

Various areas of discussion need unpacking, including the wider debate regarding the nature and relevance of disenchantment and enchantment within contemporary British society and a discussion around the relevance of the paradigm of modernity in relation to developing religions.

Paganism is a religion that does not draw from a central tract. Rather it draws on creative sources for its ideas, developing its themes and traditions from imaginings of older stories and histories. It is a newly unfolding religion whose practitioners consider it to be a contemporary version of a much older religious position. Within this review I

also consider theorists that discuss the nature of invented traditions and the use of the imagination as a source of religious activity.

### **Disenchantment and enchantment**

At the turn of the twentieth century Weber published work primarily analysing Western history as a process of development towards rationalisation. He outlined what he saw as the growth and importance in everyday life of scientific rationality in order to demonstrate that this must logically be accompanied by a decline in the power of religious belief. For Weber, this decline seemed to be a progression towards an absolute as, using a phrase borrowed from poet Friedrich Schiller, he described it as: 'the disenchantment of the world'. Following a visit to America in the early 1900's Weber published *The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism* (2002). In this he proposed that the Protestant religions, particularly Calvinism, by rejecting aspects of Catholicism such as monasticism, offered no specialness to any person in the eye of God, and relocated religious 'calling' in the world of work. A combination of hard work, a sense of frugality and restraint, and limited expenditure, had led to the availability of capital for investment in other labours and from this surplus capitalism as an economic paradigm was able to flourish. The Protestant sense of *calling* was translated into the calling to achieve the task of Life, in order to glorify God. Weber extended his analysis of Western history conceiving of it as a development of rationalisation. Correspondingly he argued that religious engagement would begin to erode in the West and with it disenchantment would occur as the processes of rationalisation would lead to greater bureaucratisation.

In 1918 he delivered a lecture entitled *Science As a Vocation* (1991a) in which he discussed various aspects of science as a vocation for an academic, including



differences that existed at that time between career paths for German, in contrast with American, academics. He continued with a discussion of what he called 'internal' conditions for considerations of science. He contended that the scientist has to accept that his work will be superseded, that there is no end to scientific work and that, rather than reaching 'fulfilment' each scientist has to accept that the role is to engender further questions.

Scientific progress, for Weber, represents a small part of the process of intellectualisation for modern humanity. He contended that a scientist does not automatically have a greater understanding of the conditions of life than an American Indian (Weber's words) for example, as the 'savage' knows his tools better and understands what he needs to do to gain his daily food. He posited however, that the scientist *could* learn these things at any time:

Principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to the magical in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service. This above all is what intellectualization means (1991a, p. 139).

He raises the question as to the value of science, in that civilised living allows modern humanity to live within a society constantly enriched with cultural ideas and knowledge, in contrast to those of older times, who could die 'satiated with life' because they had experienced all that it had to offer at that time. Death was a meaningful phenomenon for such people, but not for civilised persons who cannot become 'satiated with life'.

He was disparaging of intellectuals who might view science as a 'way to God', stating that science is irreligious and cannot answer the only important question for humanity, which is, 'what shall we do and how shall we live?'

He goes on to question whether it is possible to say that science is free from presuppositions as it presupposes that the rules of logic and method are valid, and also that what it discovers is worth being known. This cannot be proven:

It can only be *interpreted* with reference to its ultimate meaning, which we must reject or accept according to our ultimate position towards life (1991b, p. 143) (original emphasis).

Further, he says:

And still less can it be proved that the existence of the world which these sciences describe is worth while, that it has any 'meaning' or that it makes sense to live in such a world. Science does not ask for the answers to these questions (1991b, p. 144).

Weber essentially presents a picture of the modern world, dominated by the continuous movement in the process of intellectual rationalisation towards an end-point in which aspects of human living that operate in a non-rational domain will become degraded and devalued.

What is hard for modern man, and especially for the younger generation, is to measure up to *workaday* existence. The ubiquitous chase for 'experience' stems from this weakness; for it is weakness not to be able to countenance the stern seriousness of our fateful times (1991a, p. 149) (original emphasis).

Here I should address some apparent gaps in what Weber is saying. Firstly he himself is making some presuppositions in order to justify his line of debate. As Gerth and Mills have pointed out (1991, p. 51), Weber's view contains an element of enlightenment philosophy, as he seems to presuppose that the modern world is undergoing a unilinear progression towards moral perfection. Although Weber never

explicitly stated this, Gerth and Mills 'feel justified in holding that a unilinear construction is clearly implied in Weber's idea of the bureaucratic trend' (1991, p. 51). He seems to make a fairly simple transition of thought in his discussion of the ease with which a scientific academic could gain a greater knowledge of the conditions of life than the Native American and moves straight to the position that there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play. His acceptance of the unilinear progression of rationalisation appears to take no account of the pluralities of human life as it is lived by millions of individuals, both at that time, and since. He also ignores the value of emotional intelligence as he focuses his argument on intellectualism.

Several areas of the above discussion need examining. Firstly, Weber's position that it is possible to master all things by calculation is debatable. During the course of this thesis I will be presenting the activities and the viewpoints of a group of religious practitioners who seem to live within a world in which they find enchantment often in that which cannot be calculated. Secondly, there appears to be an underlying presupposition that the magical was only ever exercised by humans as a *need* in order to exercise control over forces that can now be controlled by science. Weber does not seem to consider that some humans may still *desire* to exercise the magical, and mysterious in order to cause change through a network that they perceive is accessible only by magic, and to experience the mysterious. This omission is possibly based on his presupposition that intellectualisation is the goal of all humankind, and that rationalisation is the way in which it is being achieved. Thirdly he suggests that anyone who tries to avoid the rather sterile picture he paints of a world devoid of all but the rational, a world that he describes as *workaday*, is somehow exhibiting weakness. He does not expand upon what he means by this.

Weber could not have predicted the events of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that have led to the conditions that we now live under in the contemporary West, such as the Second World War and the subsequent development of weapons of mass destruction, the development of Europeanisation, the changes in international power relationships since 9/11, and the decline of heavy industries. The contemporary world is very different from the one in which Weber was theorising.

Ruickbie (2006) has made the point that Weber did not subsequently go on to develop this notion of disenchantment, although his positing of it has led to much academic debate during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, particularly within the fields of sociology and religious studies. Hanegraaff makes the same point:

what Weber understood by *Entzauberung* remains less than fully transparent in any case, since he himself never provided a systematic treatment of the question (2003 p. 358).

If very early in the twentieth century Weber argued that the conditions inherent in the modern world would lead to disenchantment then what does the West look like now? How has it developed during the intervening century? There has been a significant shift away from the conception that all knowledge is subject to structured rationalisations, and a recognition that Western culture is made up of pluralities. In considering whether Paganism might be considered to be a modern or a postmodern phenomenon an initial analysis of what those terms might mean is a useful starting point.

## **Modernity**

Latour (1993) argues that the West never has been modern, in the sense of modernity defining a neatly categorised set of ways of defining the world. His hypothesis is that the word modern designates two different sets of practices. The first creates mixtures

between entirely new types of being – hybrids of nature and culture, which he calls *networks*. The second, that represents the modern critical stance, creates two distinct ontological zones – the human and the non-human. If we consider these as separate then we are modern. If however we look at them simultaneously then we stop being truly modern and we never have been so, as we realise that hybridisation has always existed.

Latour argues that modernity can be viewed as an attempt to purify the intermingled pluralities in Western society and to categorise them via an understanding that there exists a dichotomy between nature and culture and it has been regarded as different to a pre-modern world in which culture and nature were in engagement. He argues that such purity has never existed and that there is a proliferation of mixtures of nature and culture. In an examination of the phenomenon of contemporary Paganism I argue that Paganism, unconsciously undertaken by its practitioners represents an attempt to acknowledge all of those elements perceived to be valuable in contemporary western culture – new technologies that enhance communications, scientific advances designed to improve health, greater wealth generation giving comfortable lives for the majority but in a way that is compatible with the natural world, and that pays respect to all life, rather than that merely of the human. Paganism is attempting to imagine a place that allows for the pluralities of the modern world. It is a religion that acknowledges, if unconsciously, Latour's understanding of the contemporary world, and seeks not to change it, rather to find a methodology to encompass and understand it. Pagans do not only look at nature and culture simultaneously, they also view them holistically. In this sense, following Latour's line of reasoning Paganism cannot be viewed as a purely modern phenomenon if the world has never been modern in the strict categorising sense that modernism was initially seen as. If, however, we accept that modernism actually represents the pluralised, networked contemporary West then Paganism can be

considered to be a modern phenomenon. Pagans do not view the human and non-human as distinct arenas of being but their activities and their worldview encompasses pluralities beyond those of the primary world. The development of Paganism can be perhaps be viewed as a representative of the contemporary world in Latour's sense as one in which the pluralities and hybridities of nature, supernature, and of the primary cultural world are part of a holistic viewpoint. In this sense of modernity then the phenomenon of Paganism can be viewed as modern, if not in the sense of modernity as a project of purification.

Giddens (1990) considers that a key consequence of modernity is disembeddedness. He means the modern separation of space and time into standardised dimensions that are used by all – for example the calendar – has lifted out social relations from localised interactions and restructured them across indefinite spans of time and space. Their decontextualising has led to the widening and diffusion of social systems. He identifies two types of disembedding mechanisms involved in the development of social institutions which are symbolic tokens and expert systems.

In relation to symbolic tokens he uses the example of money to explain what he means. Money is no longer a material coinage to be used in face-to-face interactions between agents together in the same time and space, rather what he describes as 'money-proper' is independent from its means of representation and is formed as pure information via figures on a computer print-out. Exchange can be made at great distance and there is no longer a physical relationship between owner and owned. There is distanciation in time and in space. In terms of expert systems he explains that the modern world relies on professional or technical expertise systems that organise the environments in which we live. He admits, for example, that he knows nothing about house design but when at home he has faith in the expert architectural and build systems

that have led to its construction. Again there is a distancing. As a consequence of disembeddedness moderns have to rely upon 'trust', i.e. a type of faith in the principle of money or in the reliability of systems of expertise. Both expert systems and symbolic tokens act as disembedding mechanisms because of the lack of immediacy of context in the social relations involved.

Giddens argues that the contemporary world is distinct from the one lived in by humans in earlier periods in that it is a single world in many ways with a unitary framework of experience, but that it also creates 'new forms of fragmentation and dispersal.' (1991, Introduction) He goes on to discuss the development and maintenance of self-identity for modern individuals.

In the post-traditional order of modernity, and against the backdrop of new forms of mediated experience, self-identity becomes a reflexively organised endeavor. The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems. (1991, Introduction)

He posits that feelings of personal meaninglessness come to the fore in the circumstances of late modernity as everyday life poses moral questions which are not necessarily answerable. From this the reflexive project of the self generates programmes of actualisation. I argue that the developing of Paganism as a religion can be viewed as part of the reflexive project of the self in these terms, and adds some insight as to why Pagans refer to 'coming home' to this religion. In the process of self-actualisation, while there are similarities of ideas and expression in Paganism, with the intent of constructing an image of a multi-dimensional place that coherently acknowledges all things, each individual construction remains a personal envisagement that feels like home because it is the place to which they feel they naturally belong.

## Postmodernity

Terms like modernity and postmodernity are fuzzy terms whose meanings in any one context are often shaped by the person that is using them. Bauman intimates some of the conditions of what has been described as postmodernity – although this is a contested term as explained by Bauman himself. Acknowledging that postmodernity means different things to different people, he says:

It means licence to do whatever one may fancy and advice not to take anything you or the others do too seriously... It means the exhilarating freedom to pursue anything and the mind-boggling uncertainty as to what is worth pursuing and in the name of what one should pursue it...  
[postmodernity is] perhaps more than anything else – a *state of mind*  
(original emphasis) (1992, p. vii).

Bauman expands on the state of mind as being one which belongs to habitual self-reflectors, philosophers, social thinkers and artists, which is marked by derision, erosion and ‘all-dissolving destructiveness,’ which seemingly condemns all while proposing nothing. Following this line of reasoning it is difficult to attempt to classify Paganism as a postmodern phenomenon. Pagans are often the kind of reflective thinkers that Bauman describes, but if the state of mind that he describes means that the reflective activity is not serious and has no focus as to what might be worth pursuing, then postmodern is not an appropriate term to apply for them. While there can be a certain playful attitude exhibited by Pagans in their activities, built around the sense of enchantment engendered by song, story, performance and poetry, the intent of the religion is serious. Pagans are pursuing an identity that restores a sense of community, gives respect to all living things, and draws together the perceived positives of a modern cultural world with the natural world. They may challenge viewpoints that seem to



reinforce the divide between nature and culture, but such challenge is purposive and serious, not uncertain. Their state of mind is transformative rather than destructive.

More positively, Bauman goes on to argue that postmodernity has restored re-enchantment to a world disenchanted by modernity, a modernity that had arisen in response to the:

shocking realisation that human order is vulnerable, contingent and devoid of reliable foundations... if one wants things and events to be regular, repeatable and predictable, one needs to do something about it; they won't be such on their own (1992, p. xii).

Bauman sees modernity as having been the mission of western humanity, in order to prove moral righteousness.

Modernity was a continuous and uncompromising effort to fill or to cover up the void... the sin of postmodernity is to abandon the effort and to deny the belief (1992, p. xvii).

Pagans are responding to a sense of loss of identity in modern Britain and in that way may be looking to fill a void. It may be argued that their viewpoint is a moral one in that they are seeking to create a way of living within the world that has positive values and seeks to remove divisions, and following this reasoning they cannot be considered to have abandoned the effort to provide a moral response and may not therefore be categorised as postmodern in the terms that Bauman outlines. Individual practitioners often adopt or maintain personal frameworks of understanding that remain conservative and romantic. Paganism is not looking to divide and deconstruct but rather to create and unify.

## **Secularisation**

One major type of theory about religion that has developed since Weber first predicted that the West would become disenchanted has been the secularisation thesis. Bruce

gives an explanation of the development of the secularisation paradigm in the West, saying that there is no one secularisation theory, 'Rather, there are clusters of descriptions and explanations that cohere reasonably well' (2002, p. 2). He outlines each of these descriptions and explanations to build a diagrammatic model showing links between sections of that model. Briefly summarised, this model outlines three main pathways of thought that describe the paradigm as stemming from rationalisation, the social and economic changes that stemmed from the Protestant Reformation, and the development of individualism. It is not possible in this space to outline all of those pathways in detail, but essentially Bruce outlines the process of rationalisation as stemming from the development of Jewish and Christian monotheism and the separation of the sacred and the profane under one God. Previous beliefs in a proliferation of unpredictable gods were simplified, allowing the worship of God to become systematised. The development of rational systems of thought was accompanied by the development of a scientific viewpoint:

The gradual accumulation of scientific knowledge gave people insight into, and mastery over, an area that had once been a mystery; the need and opportunity for recourse to the religious gradually declined. Science and technology do not create atheists: they just reduce the frequency and seriousness with which people attend to religion (Bruce 2002, p. 27).

In relation to social and economic developments following the Protestant Reformation Bruce follows on from Weber's analysis of the Protestant ethic as leading to the development of industrial capitalism and consequent economic growth. He does so by outlining a process of structural differentiation that emerged as economic activity became divorced from the home environment and with it the increasing specialisation of roles. He states that many of the roles that had formerly been performed by the Church in the Middle Ages have gradually become secularised, giving as an example the

Church of England's provision of residential social care staffed by social workers, 'tested in secular expertise, not piety' and who are 'answerable to state – rather than church-determined standards' (2002, p. 8).

He goes on to say that structural differentiation has resulted in social differentiation as the number of roles has proliferated and the social structure has become less stable:

When the community broke into competing social groups, the religiously sanctified vision of that community, united under its God, also broke up (2002, p. 9).

He contends that egalitarianism developed partly due to the effect of Protestantism:

the religion created by the Protestant reformation was extremely vulnerable to fragmentation because it removed the institution of the church as a source of authority between God and man... Equality in the eyes of God laid the foundations for equality in the eyes of man and before the law. Equal obligations eventually became equal rights (2002, pp. 10-11).

Egalitarianism led to more flexible class divisions, economic development and occupational mobility. The stability of small local communities was broken down. He describes the process that occurred as societalisation:

Close-knit, integrated, communities gradually lost power and presence to large-scale industrial and commercial enterprises, to modern states coordinated through massive, impersonal bureaucracies, and to cities (2002, p. 13).

He argues that religion, which had drawn its strength from the community, began to lose that strength with the loss of those communities. Social and cultural diversity led to greater religious diversity. The fragmentation of religion due to the

Protestant Reformation led to schism and sects within Christianity, and over time to relativism, compartmentalism and a decline in attendance at Christian churches.

Bruce goes on to answer some criticism of the secularisation paradigm saying that it is not positing that secularisation is inevitable or universal. Nor does it contend that atheism is the end result, indeed he questions the notion that it is predicting a linear trend.

The difference between a religious and a secular world is not the possibility of imagining religious ideas... it is the likelihood of them catching on... what it does rule out is the possibility of any such theories becoming very widely accepted, under the political, social and economic circumstances that we can presently imagine... I expect the proportion of people who are largely indifferent to religious ideas to increase and the seriously religious to become a small minority (Bruce, 2002, pp. 42-43).

### **Believing without belonging**

In contrast to Bruce, Davie considers that in attempting to gain an understanding of what is happening regarding religion in post-war Britain an approach based on the concept of secularisation is, 'getting harder and harder to sustain. For not all the religious indicators are pointing in the same direction' (1994, p. 7). She describes an evident mismatch between statistics relating to religious practice and those indicating levels of religious belief:

On the one hand, variables concerned with feelings, experience and the more numinous aspects of religious belief demonstrate considerable persistence in contemporary Britain... on the other, those which measure religious orthodoxy, ritual participation and institutional attachment display an undeniable degree of secularization... both before and during the post-war period... the combination of believing without belonging... should be examined in considerable detail... for it is this particular imbalance which pervades a great deal of Britain's religious life (1994, p. 4).

The critical point that she is making is that large numbers of people in Britain express some sense of religiosity even if, in practice, those numbers do not formally attend any kind of church or participate in any other form of ritualised religious activity. She contrasts this with secularism that,

at least in any developed sense – remains the creed of a relatively small minority... in terms of belief, nominalism rather than secularism is the residual category (1994, p. 69).

As a form of shorthand she describes this phenomenon as ‘believing without belonging’.

Sutcliffe and Bowman address this thus:

If Davie (1994) has argued that an important trend in contemporary religion is ‘believing without belonging,’ implicit in this is the comparatively under-explored corollary of ‘belonging without believing’ – through custom and social pressures – which suggests that there are limitations in ‘number-crunching’ alone (2000, p. 3).

They argue that a reappraisal is taking place of how religion is classified and thought about, as:

many aspects of vernacular religion and contemporary spirituality fall outside the traditional purview of academic studies of religion, to the detriment of a rounded understanding of religious and spiritual cultures (2000, p. 2).

In this they share some agreement with Hanegraaff who sees that disenchantment is ‘a specific manifestation of the general complex of processes referred to as “secularisation” ’ (2003, p. 358). He follows this statement by clarifying that he is not subscribing to the classic secularisation thesis in which religion is considered to be undergoing a process of disappearance or marginalisation. He contends that secularisation represents a process of the profound transformation of religion. The nature of what religion is, is changing. In support of this argument, I argue that the

growth of Paganism represents a development in religiosity, as a major element of that development is the desire to form personalised connection to an idealised Place (Albion), in order to establish a cultural identity that, for practitioners, is part of their process of self-actualisation. Paganism, with a focus on the creation of a connection to an idealised place of Albion, represents a transformation in the way that the role of religion has been viewed in the West in that forming a sense of belonging to Place through religious belief and activity: a sense of indigeneity, is a relatively recent phenomenon in Britain.

### **Occulture**

Partridge (2004) considers the nature of the process of secularisation, stating that it is often regarded as the decline of religion, as religion loses social significance and its sense of magic. Partridge however, in agreement with Bruce, sees that secularisation is not a universal process, but considers it a means of identifying general trends rather than a prediction of the inevitable decline of religion.

Partridge makes the point that secularisation theory within the sociology of religion has focused on the apparent decline of popularity of Christianity, although Christianity is still a flourishing religion in many areas of the non-Western world. He suggests that the West has undergone a re-enchantment that is expressed through the language of *occulture*, a term he applies to describe ‘a return to a form of magical culture’ (2004, p. 40). He is not suggesting that occulture is a systematised way of living a religious life, rather a broad way of expressing dissatisfaction with secularisation and a scientific rationalist point of view, and a return to an engagement with the sacred, that is based in an eclectic use of that which is perceived as magical and which engenders a sense of enchantment.

I argue that the occultural activities which form an integral part of Pagan practice, such as shamanistic journeying and the casting of spells, the use of substantive myth stories, and the engagement with magical fantasy literature offer a case study of that which Partridge posits, and reveal some dismay by practitioners with some of the expressions of secular culture, with its focus on materialism, and with a scientific paradigm that is regarded by some practitioners as containing an underlying conceptualisation that the human condition is of greater importance than that of the other-than-human. Pagan envisionment of imagined Albion is partially a response to attempt to counteract this. Occultural influences are not enframned necessarily in a religious context. Partridge argues that they are embedded in popular culture, and offer discrete pockets of enchantment, but they also may influence more structured religious activity. In answer to a prediction by Bruce (2003) that Britain will be a secular society by 2030, Partridge states:

I do not hesitate to contradict such predictions. Occulture, alternative spiritualities and 'soft religion' will increase in significance in the West. That this is so will become more evident as the twenty-first century progresses (2004, p. 188).

As I argue in this thesis, Paganism, as an alternative spirituality, while not having significant numbers in terms of percentage of the population (the 2011 census shows that in most counties and London boroughs an average of 0.1% of respondents declared themselves as Pagan ([www.ons.gov.uk/census](http://www.ons.gov.uk/census))), still represents a significant religious group of people who are responding to secularisation and other factors of modernity by imagining and creating a religion that is designed to give them a sense of an encompassing cultural identity via belonging to Place, and an ensuing feeling of stability, within a pluralist culture.

### **The significance of being ‘lily white’**

Some further response to Bruce is also made in this thesis in relation to his thoughts on the significance of the New Age. He cites research undertaken by Rose (1998) that shows that of 908 readers of the magazine *Kindred Spirit* virtually without any exception the readers were middle-class, and white:

Almost all the popular New Age teachers and therapists are white, as is almost all of their audience and their market (2002, p. 89).

He goes on to make the point that neither in Heelas’ commentary on the New Age (1996) nor Sutcliffe and Bowman’s (2000) does anyone expand on the cultural make-up of its participants: ‘I cannot recall anyone previously commenting on the fact that the New Age is lily white’ (2002, p. 89).

I note throughout this thesis that observations of the Pagan communities shows that participants are largely white, and a principal concern in this analysis is to examine reasons as to why this newly forming religion is largely being created by those persons. Bruce has specifically referred to the New Age, and Heelas includes Paganism in his round-up of a large list of seemingly disparate groups, practitioners, ideas, and notions that describe what he means by New Age. The primary characteristics of the New Age for Heelas are self-spirituality, epistemological individualism (I am my own authority) and a belief in the existence of a core wisdom in all religions that is shared. He argues that all New Age activity grows from a measure of counter-cultural world rejection:

Furthermore, there are distinct signs that the counter-culture is enjoying something of a resurgence: a counter-culture, we will see, whose central figure is the pagan (1996, p. 68).

In this thesis I contribute a positive response to Bruce’s challenge that no academic analysis has been undertaken as to why people that are involved in activities



which are generically described as New Age are often white, as I argue that for the Pagan communities which are observably largely composed of white practitioners, their self-identification is partly formed from a desire to belong to a particular framework of cultural identity which is situated in the imagined pre-Christian histories of the Northern, Anglo-Saxon and Celtic worlds. This is a potential reason for the observed lack of British Black or minority ethnic practitioners. For individuals whose cultural imaginings of their own identities does not lie in the imagined communities and histories that form the backdrop to this religion, it is unlikely to hold relevance.

### **Everyday religion**

An alternative theoretical perspective on the study of religion is offered by Orsi (2012), who argues that the type of 'everyday' religion that is represented by practices such as finding saints beneath the soil of a Greek island, or dancing in the alleyways of Egyptian cities to pop music that is based on music originally composed for celebrations at the tombs of Muslim saints, reveal that the modern world has not developed in the way that it was predicted to:

'everyday religion' was fated to be outgrown by the world's cultures, beginning with the West... to be succeeded by a modern liberal faith (2012, p. 146).

He contends that the model of modern religion was considered to be a liberal one, with connections to law, political theory and science, but that since the events of 9/11 with the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York, elements of a conservative religious fundamentalism have also shown that the fundamentalist modern is another component of modern religion. Orsi argues that the study of religion has become embroiled in the trap of modernism, where virtually all analysis of religion is undertaken against the background of the model of modernity. He proposes the use of a

theoretical perspective that he describes as 'everyday' religion. The central question in the study of everyday religion is:

How to account for the relationship between articulations of a coherent world-view and the practice and knowledge of living a life (2012, p. 152).

The everyday religious is not performed by rote or in accordance with authority; it is improvised and situational (2012, p. 150).

Orsi argues that for those who experience everyday religion, the gods (he uses this term as a synecdoche for supernatural beings holistically) are:

encountered in the circumstances of everyday life as objective, really real... if we do not find a way of studying such experiences of really realness then... we will fail to understand much of human life (2012, p.158).

In arguing for a different approach to the analysis and understanding of religious experience Orsi defines three pairs of opposites that have shaped contemporary Western analysis of religion. These are sacred/profane, us/them and presence/absence. His model of everyday religion does not consider the sacred and profane as distinct, but rather as a helix, each twisting around and through the other, 'through the movement of people's days' (2012, p. 154). He argues that the notion of modern us and primitive them has been fundamental in shaping religious analysis and in the making of modern notions of religion, saying that everyday practitioners were the ones destined to disappear, 'according to the normative timeline of religious theory' (2012, p. 154), but that they have not. In terms of presence he states:

real presence was just what modern people were expected to grow out of in time... the experience of presence is not a matter solely of the vertical, but the horizontal too. Men and women engaging and being engaged by the gods are also at the same time in relationships to other persons, in their families, states, communities and social worlds. These others include the dead and the absent... (2012, p. 156).

In this thesis I argue that Paganism may be interpreted as a modern phenomenon as it simultaneously stems from and is part of, the often confusing pluralities and conditions of modernity that have led to loss of feelings of identity and security. Pagans do encounter the sacred and profane in a braided way however. Their imagined place is one in which the boundless and the boundaried dance together forming endless patterns of tension and engagement. They are representative of peoples that experience an everyday lived reality that includes gods and other supernatural beings.

### **The work of the imagination**

Alternative theories to the secularisation theory regarding the development of religious activities in the West seek to explain what is happening in other terms than as a decline of religiosity as a result of a focus on rationalism. In relation to newly-emerging religions they focus more on the changing ways that religious activity is being expressed in which that which can be imagined appears to be an integral factor. Appadurai, in his discussion of the cultural dimensions of globalisation argues that the joint effect of electronic mass-media and migration defines the link between globalisation and the modern and argues for 'the *work of the imagination* as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity' (original emphasis) (1996, p. 3). He suggests that the imagination in the post-electronic world has become newly significant in that it is not just a matter for those involved with the arts or humanities but has become part of everyday life, as migrations have created diasporas that utilise electronic media to creatively build and express their own imaginings. He argues that 'the work of the imagination...is neither purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplined but is a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own

practices of the modern' (1996, p. 4), and that there has been a shift in recent decades in which the imagination has become a collective, social fact.

He draws a distinction between imagination and fantasy and argues against Weber's notion that the imagination would be stunted by the forces of rationalism, and secularisation. He sees the imagination as powerful when it is collective, as it can lead to action, whereas fantasy he contends, feels more individualistic. The collective imagination leads to action and is 'today a staging ground for action, and not only for escape' (1996, p. 7). Pagan practitioners are individually imagining a place that holds feelings of connection and security for them and respond to this imagined place as if it was home. This mutually imagined religion leads to action via environmental protests, the creation of arts and artefacts, the formation of communities and work within the wider communities through schools, hospitals, and prisons.

For Appadurai there is a move away from the classical modernisation theory that assumes the salience of the nation-state, due to globalising influences that lead to sodalities that are often transnational or postnational and often operate beyond national boundaries. The emergence of expressive forms of media allow modernity to be rewritten more as vernacular globalisation. Globalisation does not represent cultural homogenisation as culture is not a thing. He suggests it might be better considered as an arena of phenomena. Considering it like this, rather than as a substance, he argues, allows for thinking about culture as a device with which we can use to discuss difference. He suggests the use of the word culturalism as a way to discuss movements that involve identities that are consciously being made. As the imagining of place and the sense of self-identity that arises from it forms the core argument of this thesis, I posit that the development of Paganism illustrates Appadurai's contention that the work of the imagination is a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity.

I argue that enchantment for Pagans is sourced in the cultural self-identities that they are forging, and it arises in the tensions between the bounded and the boundless, between place and space, myth and fantasy, the secular and the sacred, the primary and the secondary dimensions.

Pagans are creating an imagined community of place from within these tensions. Connection to locality is an integrating theme. I posit that this is not a connection that is born from the political dimension of the nation-state. It can be regarded in a gentler sense as a feeling of indigeneity and/or a sense of belonging.

### **Nation-ness and enchantment**

Anderson has discussed the emergence of nation-states, analysing them as imagined political communities. In considering them as imagined he provides a response to Gellner (2006), arguing that Gellner is so anxious to show that nationalism 'masquerades under false pretenses' that he 'assimilates 'invention' to fabrication' and 'falsity', rather than to 'imagining' and 'creation' (Anderson, 2006, p. 6).

Anderson argues that since the Second World War every successful revolution has defined itself in national terms. Many 'old' nations have been challenged by sub-nationalisms within their borders and concludes:

the 'end' of the era of nationalism,' so long prophesied, is not remotely in sight. Indeed, nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time... Nations, nationality, nationalism – all have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyse... theory about it is conspicuously meagre (2006, p. 3).

Three paradoxes, he argues, have caused difficulties in theorising about nationalism. He outlines these as, the objective modernity of nations to the historian versus the subjective antiquity in eyes of nationalists, the formal universality of nationality as a sociocultural concept by which he means that in the modern world there

is an expectation that everyone 'should' have a nationality, and the 'political' power of nationalisms versus their philosophical poverty and incoherence. In relation to this final consideration he comments:

'This 'emptiness' easily gives rise, among cosmopolitan and polylingual intellectuals, to a certain condescension...It would, I think, make things easier if one treated it as if it belonged with 'kinship' and 'religion', rather than with 'liberalism' or 'fascism' (2006, p. 5).

As I argue in this thesis that an underlying factor for the development of Paganism in Britain is the desire to belong to an imagined integrated and integrating place, I am addressing his first paradox by offering a definition of enchantment as not only a transcendent response to something larger and more meaningful than the individual, which is often interpreted as the supernatural, but for Pagans is also located and based in desire for connectedness to place. This type of enchantment might give some explanation as to the imagined antiquity of the religion that Pagans subscribe to. Such antiquity offers them a rootedness. Anderson talks about feelings of nation-ness as different to, if aligned with, nationalism. Nationalism as a term describes activities that arise from expressions of the nation-state with its political and geographical boundaries. Feelings of belonging to what he describes as a horizontal comradeship, he argues, is what makes people willing to die for their imagined communities. This colossal sacrifice stems from what he sees as the cultural roots of nationalism. He defines these as having been the religious community and the dynastic realm. He analyses that the decline in religious certainties in the eighteenth centuries led to a corresponding decline in explanations for death and continuity. Alongside this the decline in the use of old sacred languages (Latin, Greek and Hebrew) and the corresponding rise of the use of vernacular languages contributed to the development of the model of nationalism,

particularly through the standardisation of languages via print-capitalism – newspapers and the novel.

For these forms provided the technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the kind of imagined community that is the nation (2006, p. 25).

In relation to this discussion of Paganism, I offer an explanation of the expression ‘coming home’ against Anderson’s definition of home as ‘something to which one is naturally tied.’ (2006, p. 143) analysing that what Pagans are looking to create is connection to place, imagined through myth and fantasy. Their imagined community is one of nation-ness rather than nationality. Community and comradeship are the defining factors, rooted in a diffuse loyalty to place, rather than an attachment to the political dimensions of the nation-state. Paganism does not exhibit a racist fear of the Other, rather it exemplifies an enchanted attachment to a larger and meaningful community of place. This enchanted attachment to place gives some explanation to Anderson’s first paradox regarding the problem for theorists in trying to understand the nation as an objective development of modernity but being unable to account for the subjective antiquity of the nation for participants. The nation-state belongs in the primary and often disenchanted world. Nation-ness is better defined as an enchanted activity, for Pagans.

### **Developing identity**

During the course of this thesis I offer an analysis of the contemporary British Pagan community as an emerging religion that is developing as a response to uncertainty arising from feelings of loss of identity and community stimulated by the conditions of modernity: secularisation, the controls of state bureaucracy and the paradigm of rationalism. This religious community is constructing its own sense of belonging and collectivity through activities designed to draw together imagined elements of the pre-

modern past, and combine them with desired elements of the present, in order to establish a meaningful vision of the future. This activity is centred in the place of Britain, which in its imagined state is multi-dimensional.

One of the means by which this religious community is constructing itself is through the use of stories that tie it into an imagined history and an imagined older religion, understood to be indigenous by many practitioners. How are these practitioners constructing their religion? They are doing so by building a community through older myth stories, fantasy stories, personal myths, and historical imaginings. Eclectic gatherings of ideas are taken from popular culture, in the way that Partridge (2004) suggests, and endlessly combined by individuals in ways that enable shared sets of understandings to be conveyed through rituals, books, magazines, moots, web-sites and articles.

The study undertaken with this particular community lies at the confluence of ideas about the influence of older myth stories, fantasy literature, engagement with imagined ancestry, debates about disenchantment, re-enchantment and enchantment, visions of *Britain* as *Albion* and the formation of cultural identity, and responses to secularisation. As a result, this initial review has concentrated on outlining some of the current argument taking place about modernity, postmodernity, secularisation, disenchantment and re-enchantment, the significance in the contemporary West of the work of the imagination, and how these theoretical positions relate to religiosity in Britain. As previously stated, during each of the following chapters I consider current arguments relating to the topics under particular discussion.



## Chapter Three: Methodology

Scholars of religion do not study alternate realities themselves, since these cannot be studied, but they analyse what is postulated about that which is non-falsifiable and in what ways this affects the communities which do the postulating. As a scholar of religion, my aim is to describe, fairly represent and interpret what identifiable communities say, do and believe as a direct result of postulating alternate realities. My descriptions are accountable to the data; my representations need to include the communities I am representing and my interpretations need to be grounded in my own acknowledged and transparent personal constructs. If this means that I am pinning the study of religion on a transcendental referent, I admit it... but I am doing so because that is precisely what the members of the community themselves do (Cox, 2006, p. 238).

The purpose of this chapter is to explain why I initially began this piece of research and what I was seeking to discover. I outline the strategies that I adopted and adapted along the way, as a result of my developing understanding regarding myself as the researcher and about the methodologies I was using. I discuss some of the obstacles that I tackled and outline what I learned about the use of these methodologies.

### **Why *this* research?**

This research stemmed from curiosity that, like myself, a number of other contemporary Pagan had stated that ‘finding’ this religion had engendered a sense of ‘coming home’ for them. As I, when as a new Pagan practitioner, had also experienced this same feeling, believing at the time it to be an individual experience, I became curious as to what factors may have contributed to this. In early considerations I reviewed my own history and listened to the interests of other Pagans to try to establish an initial conception of potential contributory factors, realising that the reading of fantasy literature, particularly the novels of Alan Garner, had created a sense of enchantment for

me and had done so for others. It initially seemed that using his work as a lens through which to examine the situation was a useful start-point in looking to identify possible causal factors.

At this early stage my hypothesis was that there existed a link between some element within Garner's novels and something thematic within, or integral to, Paganism and that this link, if identified, could provide a wider viewpoint on developments within British society. A secondary hypothesis was that if the constituent parts of that link could be isolated then it might be possible to examine other arenas of British culture in order to establish a broader theme of connectivity.

The early fieldwork began to reveal that many Pagans read and engage with a wide range of fantasy texts, particularly if those texts are rooted in specific landscapes that exist in the world of the senses, the 'real' world, but which also encompass a secondary world that integrates with those landscapes. The most popularly cited works were those that utilised places that seemed as though they could be enchanted landscapes of Britain, for example Middle Earth, and that contained enchanted figures such as elves and dwarfs, seemingly rooted in northern mythologies.

### **Choosing a research group**

This research had to be conducted among Pagans as the phenomenon under study stemmed from that description of 'coming home' to this religion. This suggested a number of things: firstly that this was not a received religion absorbed by these individuals through the social and familial situations into which they had been born and raised. Secondly that they held pre-existing understandings of significance to them that were somehow named and given identity by the use of the word *Paganism*, and thirdly,

by the use of the word 'home' they were indicating a space that signalled for them a sense of safety and kinship.

The research with this community therefore needed to try to isolate how and why these particular feelings were engendered, and within whom, in order for some analysis to be made that might indicate conditions relating to religion within the wider culture in Britain.

Pagan practitioners are threaded geographically throughout Britain self-identifying variously within differing pathways, or indeed remaining isolated as individual practitioners. The reception in the wider culture of labels such as Pagan, Witch, Heathen or Druid can vary in degree from conceptions of practitioners as downright evil, to suggestions of racism, to the merely eccentric (often images absorbed via poorly researched media articles). Therefore there exists hesitancy within Pagan communities to be too revealing. As Hanegraaff states:

Contemporary magicians still have to deal with the suspicion that they are engaged in satanic or otherwise sinister activities, but this aspect of legitimisation now concerns merely the need to deal with prejudice from outsiders (2003, p. 369).

The desire not to reveal is reinforced in some communities by the understanding that their religious practice is intended to be esoteric, occult and therefore only to be revealed to other practitioners at an appropriate stage in their development. The combination of these factors meant that I had to consider how to contact and consult with individuals to build relationships based on trust, alongside my own ethical considerations as to how to handle data containing innermost thoughts, opinions, and feelings, in a way that was sensitive and appropriate, both for the subjects and for the subsequent analysis.

Making suitable contacts varied in its success. As I am a practising Druid, making contacts within this particular community was an easier task as there existed a certain level of trust for the research subjects, and networking through personal contacts took place. Making contacts with Witches proved more problematic, and making contacts with Heathens most problematic of all.

As I had initially come from a more eclectic Pagan background I was able to find 'gatekeepers' to act as an introduction into Witchcraft groups and goddess-oriented groups that were more loosely aligned, and I was able to engage and converse with practitioners who had formerly worked within the more structured environment of Wicca, but I was unable to persuade any Wiccan coven to allow me to participate in their rituals. After quite some time I also made contact with several Heathen practitioners, again who were prepared to talk to me on an individual basis rather than allow me into their groups, but I was allowed to participate in the meetings of a newly forming group of Heathens. Research within the Heathen and Wiccan communities has therefore been more reliant on personal testimony, websites and practitioner publications than that conducted among Druids. The analysis of the Druid data is therefore fuller but has required a greater degree of reflexivity on my part as the researcher/analyst because of my situation within the subject group. I gained greater rapport with Druids because their perception was that I would be balanced in my enquiry but I have concentrated on the calibration of my position between that of subject and object, aware that a level of empathy with the respondents on its own would not lead to a developed and balanced analysis in critical terms.

My engagement with Witches and Heathens has enabled me to appraise different emphases within the pathways and in my analysis of the data gathered I have subsequently focused on the aspect of identity formation in relation to place. My

analysis indicates that the desire to establish an identity of place is integral within the religion, although to varying degrees, dependent upon the practitioner and the pathway followed and that this is a fresh arena for consideration in terms of a religion in the West seeking to create a tradition that is perceived by them as indigenous.

One of the greatest difficulties I have had to be aware of in order to overcome, is in being too close to the data to actually sometimes be able to 'see'. As a Druid practitioner I have developed interpretations, in conjunction with other practitioners, of what is meaningful within that religiosity, which in the early stages of the analysis made it difficult for me to actually perceive and interpret what was taking place. Initially I was unaware of this and only by a process of reflexivity did I come to understand that I was missing the capture of some data that might be of relevance and was failing to analyse and interpret adequately. Once I became consciously aware that this was occurring I was better able to address it by beginning a systematic process of questioning everything that I was examining and attempting to eradicate assumption. This process became more acute as I was writing up the thesis when I realised that I was using some data without proper explanation, because I was assuming too much.

As there is a wide but not numerically large spread of participants geographically, I attempted to make contacts as widely as possible with respondents. I made contacts through individuals and through online contacts. The personal contacts proved to be the most useful due to the 'word of mouth' respondents that ensued, although I did make some helpful contacts via technology and obtained significant data by e-mail and during telephone interviews.

## **My presence in the research**

As stated, I am a Pagan Druid. This means that as the person that I am, *in myself*, I believe in the existence of some kind of a spirit or energy that connects all things. My conception of it is as a huge energy network, that may or may not have a consciousness of its own, but which acts as a transmission device through which all manner of knowledge, understanding and will may pass. I therefore believe in the power of magic. This means that within the research I do hold an understanding that might be termed 'native'. I acknowledge the existence of a secondary supernatural dimension. There is potential strength in this in the sense that my ability to empathise with the subjects of the research is enhanced, while the analysis runs the risk of being less critical.

The intention of the study was to speak to, listen to, interact with, practitioners of British Paganisms in order to investigate the relevance that certain kinds of myth and fantasy stories may hold within the religion, in order to analyse and draw conclusions about that religion and its relationship to the wider culture in Britain. Having an understanding of the kind of immanent referent that may be shaping and being shaped by the use of such stories assisted with interpretation of the meanings the respondents conveyed, and I was able to use my understanding of it as a concept to thicken my interpretation of action. The research was intended to be at a microscopic level in order to focus on the in-depth personal meaningful formations that are drawn from such stories, and to examine how these are expressed, in order for a process of interpretation to take place as to how practitioners perceive, understand, shape and practise their religious lives within twenty-first century British culture. My positioning within the research then enabled me to accept their understandings, and contextualise the practices and meanings of their discussion and activities, allowing me to display an empathy with

the subjects of the research which in turn enabled them to feel more relaxed with my potentially intrusive presence in the meanings that they have constructed in their lives.

### **Dialogic interaction**

Flood argues for a re-thinking of the study of religions with a critique that an alternative approach to that of the phenomenological philosophy of consciousness might be that of dialogism:

Rather than the detached observer viewing and mapping data, free from value judgements, I have argued that the observer is always situated and embodied, within a specific, historical context, in a relationship of dialogue with the 'object' – in fact fellow 'subjects' – of inquiry. The relationship between inquirer and people enquired about, or, indeed, tradition, is one of dialogue in which communication, and intersubjectivity, rather than the certainty of consciousness, are given (1999, p. 168).

Reading Flood during the early stages of the research induced a considerable shift in my understanding of my undertaking. Although self-reflexivity has been a constant process during the undertaking of this research, in order to progressively assess my situated position and develop both my skills and my theoretical understanding during that process, in the earliest stages, while I was in the position of what Geertz (1973, p. 13) describes as 'Finding my feet...' I had considered what methods I might best employ in order to pay attention to and be present within the religious lives of my research subjects, and had decided that participant observation and qualitative interviews were the primary practical ethnographic methods for beginning to engage with the research. I had read and made notes on the practicalities of undertaking qualitative research (Ely *et al*, 1991), set up logs, considered triangulation, filled my pockets with pens, and was ready to begin. At that point I realised that I did not really know how to proceed, in the sense that I was unsure of my position within the research.

My initial understanding was that I needed to be as scientific as possible i.e. staying remote from my subjects, formulating my questions rigorously and only asking identical questions of each subject. This construct was a survival from my 1970s education in the natural sciences. I was definitely situating myself as the observer, analysing the subject from a position of outsider. Following a short period of questioning with a pilot group this position rapidly felt untenable. Not only was I stifling the responses by being too rigid about the questions, but they *were* questions. There was no sense of engagement between myself and, those that I came to realise, were the other *participants* in the research. In response to this I began to ask similar questions of my participants to initiate areas of enquiry, but I began to allow them to range farther and wider in what they wanted to discuss with me. Following further analysis of my transcriptions, I made some re-visits for further clarification and began to extend the questioning. Beginning to reach a more perceptive understanding of the importance of the quality of the interaction between researcher and other participants, after considering Flood's argument, enabled me to relax and engage with them in a manner that invited greater participation from them. It also meant that my ability to analyse that which I was seeing, hearing and perceiving became more sophisticated.

From an operational in-the-field point of view, I realised that the effect that my early contemporaneous note-taking was having was to stem the natural flow of the dialogue and I fairly quickly moved to the use of a digital voice recorder, with permissions from the research subjects. This enabled me to be more present during the interactions, open myself more fully to the vocal tone, body language and activity involved in the engagements, and improve the establishment of rapport. In short, I began to move to a more dialogic position, as described by Flood:



dialogism is a discourse which focuses upon dialogue, utterance and heteroglossia... At the heart of dialogism is the concept of 'dialogue', the idea that every utterance or thought enters into relationship with other utterances and thoughts not only in the present but stretching into the past and future (1999, p. 150).

### **Utterance and heteroglossia**

According to Flood all understanding is embodied within the dialogical encounter, the focus of which is the utterance, which is the basis of the analysis of communication that is active or performed and is always a response to a previous utterance. By heteroglossia he means the plurality of voices within cultures. He posits that an utterance is not simply a speech act but one that occurs in a language within a specific social, cultural and historical context. This means that all utterances hold meaning only in relation to other utterances. These meanings are often in tension with one another within a complex series of relationships – intertextuality.

In relation to my research I gradually came to the understanding that I was taking a dialogic position. I was in conversation with my research participants, noting and attempting to situate their utterances in order to analyse them within wider cultural contexts. For this reason I needed to have a clear understanding of my own place in the context of the relationship between me as researcher and the other participants as subjects and colleagues-in-discovery.

### **Outline of the fieldwork**

In outlining the fieldwork undertaken I am conscious that I am formulating a description that will in some sense appear chronological and coherent when, in actuality and particularly in the very early days, my activities were more chaotic and unstructured than will appear. This was due to my inexperience with this kind of research, and lack of a clearly defined pathway for that which I wished to achieve. I had an initial fairly

simple hypothesis as outlined above, and my early steps were to establish links with potential respondents. I began to develop my research group by contacting fellow Pagans, explaining fairly briefly what my research was concerning and asking for potential respondents to make contact with me via e-mail. I suggested e-mail as I felt that this might make it more comfortable for individuals to make initial contact, to discuss with me what their participation might incur and to make their decisions without feeling pressured. In this way I established a pilot group for the study of about eight individuals.

Feeling in the early stages that I needed to develop a basis of trust, and initially needing to discover who these respondents were in relation to their religious practice, I asked a short series of questions that was designed to ascertain the self-definitions of my pilot group and started to organise some shape from their responses. After transcribing their interviews I was then enabled to revisit them to undertake more involved discussions based upon what they had originally told me. The pilot group consisted of self-identifying eclectic Pagans, Druids and Witches. At that stage I had no Heathen respondents. From these early rather stilted beginnings I began to expand more freely in my discussions with practitioners and I began to expand the numbers of respondents via networks within the communities.

During my attendances at varied Pagan events I began to pay more attention to artefacts on sale, Pagan publications, informal utterances, ritual activities and I kept a notebook of any ideas or circumstances as they occurred, or shortly thereafter.

Analysing the data as I went along, particularly from the process of transcribing, I began to formulate the hypothesis that led to my overall argument in this thesis which is that British Paganism is a religion that is developing in part as a response to a desire to belong to a particular cultural identity, drawing on popular culture and an imagined

history reinforced by a particular set of mythological stories. Once I had formulated this hypothesis then my observations in the field extended to look for signs of this, or to discover signs to the contrary.

While initially finding the process of transcribing an onerous task due to the number of times I had to listen to the interviews, I soon realised how very useful this work is as it enabled me to get close to the data itself and become very familiar with pauses, silences, humour and inflections and enrich my understanding of what was being conveyed, in a way which informed my analysis and interpretation much more deeply. I began to understand the real value of this type of work. I also had to consider how to record these interactions in order to show what had taken place beyond the words themselves. During this thesis I have adopted the convention of using a short hyphen (-) to indicate a short pause being made by a respondent.

I have also had to consider how to handle considerable amounts of data. In the early stages I kept hand-written logs of the transcriptions but as I began to amass greater amounts of data I realised that I needed to find a technological solution and I created spreadsheets as logs and transferred across all that I had already collected.

### **Flexing positions**

The people that I worked with came from a wide variety of backgrounds, with multiple experiences, understandings and conceptualisations of the emergence of their own beliefs and practices. Some identified themselves as Druids, some as Witches, some as Heathens and some more generally as eclectic Pagans. Each one was an individual and therefore my situated position needed to be flexible enough to accommodate each. With AD, a Druid, a middle-aged white man, from Middle England, there was an immediate rapport. We were practitioners of Paganism along similar lines. Our understandings of

what Paganism is were similar, therefore establishing a relationship that allowed for ease of utterances. The issue for me was to remain mindful of our similarities while being aware of obvious differences of understanding that might arise due to my gender difference for instance, and more particularly I had to remain vigilant to the fact that we were not two Druids in conversation, but a researcher and a practitioner.

With CW, a white middle-aged woman, who self-identifies as a Witch, and is a follower of Starhawk, if she follows any particular path, I had to remain alert to my own feelings towards a rather more strictly feminist approach than I felt comfortable with. GH, a Priestess of Avalon, a white middle-aged woman, shared with me her belief in British goddesses in general after her reading of books written by Kathy Jones (2001), who initiated the contemporary religion centred upon the Glastonbury goddess. Here I had to remain aware of my own slightly pejorative attitude towards the type of research conducted which would probably not stand up within an academic context, in order to ensure that I maintained, what Cox has earlier described as, a fair representation and interpretation of the particular religious community under discussion. Here I was less anxious about re-calibrating my emic status than in re-calibrating my etic status. This I realised led to a problem within my analysis that I had not expected. I discovered that in my desire to make it obvious that I was not going 'native' within the analysis, I was making claims that were perhaps too harsh in terms of my overall interpretations, and that I had not fully considered the potential effects of some of those claims on the communities themselves. I therefore had to reconsider and refine my analysis to determine whether my contentions were calibrated, and had to redraw some of the conclusions made. These are examples of the types of continual reflexive thought that I sought to maintain and the re-positioning that I had to undertake in order to maintain intersubjectivity.

## Geertz – Thick Description

Finding our feet, an unnerving business which never more than distantly succeeds, is what ethnographic research consists of as a personal experience; trying to formulate the basis on which one imagines, always excessively, one has found them is what anthropological writing consists of as a scientific endeavor. We are not... seeking either to become natives... or to mimic them... We are seeking... to converse with them (Geertz, 1973, p. 13).

Geertz's analysis of anthropological method which he calls 'thick description' (following from philosopher Gilbert Ryle), runs in parallel with Flood's call for a movement beyond phenomenology in Religious Studies, in that he focuses on the interaction between participants as the space in which understanding can take place. He posits that it is in the interpretation of what the researcher observes and records that the science occurs. He argues that by treating culture purely as a symbolic system there lies a danger of locking cultural analysis away from its proper object that he describes as the informal logic of actual life. It is through behaviours i.e. social action that cultural forms find articulation. He posits that the construction of impeccable depictions of formal order discredits cultural analysis because no one can quite believe in such impeccability.

For him the academic importance of ethnography is the recording of social discourse that can be re-consulted and therefore not lost forever, or, as he describes it, wasted.

Geertz is not suggesting that the science is in the simple recording of an event or a transaction but in the level of interpretation that is given to such an event by the ethnographer. He illustrates his meaning of 'thick description' using Ryle's narration of winking boys. An ethnographer can merely record that a boy winks, which is a physical gesture, or he can record that another boy winks to mimic the first, or that another winks to signal a message. It is not the simple act of winking that is important it is the social

context and meaning that surrounds them that the ethnographer must perceive and understand in order to make a robust interpretation. The microscopic analysis is what is important in studying these individual passing transactions.

Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning (1973, p. 5).

As I became more aware of these theoretical positions I began to understand where I belonged within the research, as an informed participant, recording as accurately as possible the thoughts and activities of a group of people, and making an interpretive analysis of the meanings they construct in their lives as members of the wider society in Britain culture.

### **Some issues considered**

Some issues of confidentiality arose as I contracted with practitioners. While certain individuals were comfortable to converse with me openly, many were not. I duly recorded their reservations and requirements. In the writing up, as I intended to use direct information on occasions, which participants had given to me, this meant that for some I was putting names forward and for others I was not. I decided that to take an overall and fair approach to the writing up that I would simply use initials for the respondent and where relevant the particular pathway that they identified with. In conveying their thoughts it seemed appropriate to include the actual voices of the participants as the data itself lies in their original expressions, but without causing them difficulties either in their lives in wider society or in their lives as religious practitioners.

I also took this into account in terms of ethical considerations within the research. Most of the research was either conducted via formal or informal interviews or

via actual participation in ceremonies, gatherings in pubs, sewing circles and other varied events. For many of these I had openly stated my involvement in research. At some events however, I was either within a large group and would physically have been unable to make everyone aware, or I had not attended as a researcher bearing in mind that I am a religious practitioner, but would see or overhear something during my religious observance that was of relevance. On these occasions I personally would find my situated position oscillating rapidly between that of subject and observer. On those occasions, if it was not possible to make contact with the practitioners involved to explain my position I would make notes soon afterwards and sift out anything that seemed to identify any individual involved.

When interviewing Alan Garner I also had to consider two particular areas of care in relation to him. Firstly he has made it publicly known that he suffers from bipolar disorder, which can affect him at any time. Secondly, he does not particularly care to examine his own writing process, except at his own choosing. He described this to me as his 'back of the head syndrome'. Bearing in mind that my presence in that process might therefore be potentially damaging I made the decision to withdraw from my engagement with him at a point where I felt I may have asked him to stray into territory that he did not wish to examine. By doing so I was able to leave the pathway open to him should I wish to return.

Geographical distances were also problematic within this research, in terms of time and costs for me as a part-time researcher, working full-time and being a lone parent. I travelled across the country to meet respondents in the areas listed above, but I also utilised technology to gather data.

Websites, forums and social media are becoming prevalent communications tools and cyber-communal spaces for many Pagans. These have been very useful areas

for research, but as Pike (2001) acknowledges using them as information sources feels like ‘lurking’. Any information I have gained from such sources has been treated with the same care for confidentiality and non-disclosure of the identities involved as with the known respondents.

There have also been ethical considerations towards myself as a religious practitioner. Having to scrutinise my own personal meanings has proved challenging as I have noted a certain distance arising in myself that expresses itself as a feeling of slight disenchantment. I have dealt with this by continuing with regular religious practice and by considering that putting my personal meanings to the test can only be a healthy activity.

As mentioned above, I have also had to consider the potential impact of conclusions that I have drawn, following on from my analysis. With any piece of text there will be an amount of reinterpretation by the reader as part of any creative interaction as she or he brings to the text their own individual positioning and worldview. While I, as the writer, can have no control over the reader response, I do have the responsibility of conveying my contentions as clearly as possible, ensuring that my intent is clear as far as is consciously possible, of any underlying bias. I also am responsible for considering that my own situated position can have unintended effects on the intent of the text if I have not clearly examined my location in the analysis and interpretation of activity. Therefore I have had to seriously address the likely affects that lack of clarity might have on reinterpretation particularly for a group of religious practitioners that already are received with an amount of suspicion from others within the wider culture. As the large majority of Pagan practitioners that I have observed over a decade have been white, I have responded in this thesis to Bruce’s (2002) challenge to academia for some analysis to be made as to why those persons that seem to be



involved in beliefs and practices that might be described as of the 'New Age' are largely white, but I have had to give serious consideration to the argument that I am making in relation to British Pagan communities and the underlying establishment of a sense of cultural identity that ties them into the particular landscapes of Britain. As Hall (2013) states, practices of representation always implicate the positions from which any of us speak or write. He describes this as the positions of enunciation. I emphasise here then, as a white person and as a Pagan practitioner that the commentary I am making is not about these persons as white in terms of ethnicity, but rather about the cultural background and history that these religious practitioners imagine as their own. This ties in with an enchanted connection to a particular Place, which practitioners also view as being a microcosm of a greater and more universal religion that ties all peoples into connection with landscapes world-wide. I do not therefore suggest that the religion is intended to be exclusionary and intended only for one group of people, rather that it perhaps does not attract individuals that do not hold an individual understanding of their own history and background that feeds into this particular imagining. As Hall (2013) reminds us, claims about identity are problematical because identity is not fixed but is created through process, and is never complete. Cultural identities are not an essence but rather a positioning. They are in translation as meaning is never complete.

### **Practicalities**

My research techniques have been various. Over eight years I have engaged in participant observation at general Pagan events that are not designed for members from any particular groups but are open to all. These have ranged from talks on particular archaeological sites in Britain, to workshops, for example with a Siberian shaman, and to engaging in circle dancing, to open ceremonies at Stonehenge led by Druid

participants, to administration meetings for the holding of the annual goddess camp in Nottingham, to craft-making workshops held by Witches for their local community, to open gatherings held by the Pagan Federation at various locations in the East Midlands such as Derby, Leicestershire and Nottingham, and to attendance at major conferences such as Witchfest held annually in Croydon, attending discussions on topics as varied as Northern Tradition Witchcraft, the Heathen Path, and Pictish Witchcraft in Scotland. I have attended craft workshops and have taken part in night-time rituals and day-time rituals.

As I am a Druid member of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids (OBOD), I have also taken part in Gorsedds (traditionally meetings of Bards but within the order including meetings of Ovates and Druids also), gatherings for the celebration of the Summer and Winter Solstice celebrations in Glastonbury and Druid ceremonies at Stonehenge. I have visited moots with the Druid Order of Tamaris (DOT), based in South West England, and celebrated with them on Dartmoor. I have undertaken the three elements of training in OBOD Druidry, a process that took four years and I have undertaken training in shamanic practice, a process that took three years. I have undertaken rituals with my working partner and rituals as a solo practitioner in Derbyshire. I have participated in rituals on Anglesey and in rituals held in the Chalice Well Gardens in Glastonbury and visited the Glastonbury Goddess temple. I have attended OBOD Grove moots in Leicestershire. I have joined an Asatru study group and taken part in the early activities involved in the formation of a Heathen kindred.

Primary written sources have been invaluable, particularly from leading Pagan practitioners, whose influence has been key. These include works by Gerald Gardner, Janet and Stewart Farrar, Ross Nichols, Philip Carr-Gomm, Emma Restall-Orr, Starhawk, and Pete Jennings.

I have undertaken a range of interviews, both formal and informal, with Pagan participants from a wide variety of self-identified backgrounds. Some have been Reclaiming Witches, some have had a more traditional background in Witchcraft, a couple have been ex-Wiccans, some are Druids, some are shamanic practitioners. I have interviewed a Priestess and a Brother of Avalon, followers of the Glastonbury goddess. I have also interviewed Pagans that are content to use the label Pagan with no further self-definition.

I have looked in detail at many of the fiction books that have been cited as influential by these practitioners. A large number of the stories cited by participants have been published within the fantasy genre, and books that have had a shared popularity have included such works as Tolkien's *Lord of The Rings* (1978), C.S. Lewis's *Narnia* series, Alan Garner's *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (2002a), *The Wizard of Earthsea* by Ursula Le Guin (1971), *Mythago Wood* by Robert Holdstock (2002), and a particular favourite has been *The Mists of Avalon* by Marion Zimmer Bradley (1982). Analysis of the similarities and dissimilarities between these works has helped to define the themes and contexts of these works in relation to the themes and contextualisations of Paganism in itself.

Inevitably participants in the interviews have outlined other types of work that have been influential on them. These have included films, although these have been cited fairly infrequently, and television programmes such as *Dr Who*. Part of my research has therefore included examining some of these books, films and television programmes in more detail.

Other places from which to find out what Pagans think and what they do have included Pagan magazines such as The Children of Artemis' *Witchcraft and Wicca*

magazine, *The Sacred Hoop* (shamanic practice), the magazine of the Pagan Federation, and *Touchstone*, a Druidic publication.

The music of popular musicians within the Pagan community has been examined carefully to consider the lyrics, which very often reflect certain aspects of particular types of Paganism; the band *Daughters of Gaia* reflecting a more woman-centric, political aspect of Paganism, while the lyrics of *Damh* (pronounced Dave) *The Bard* and duo *DragonFly Moon* show a greater interest in Celtic myth stories.

Having undertaken research within the Druid and Witchcraft communities, I was aware that I had much less contact within the communities that define themselves as Heathen. Although there are certain similarities between these communities, there are also significant differences. I considered that there would be a gap in the research were I to be unable to make contact with this community. Having trawled generally through websites searching to make contact, I found a number of sites that were obviously not used much and which came to a dead end. I attempted to make contact with a Hearth through a Heathen member of the Pagan Federation, an attempt that also failed. Recent contact has been made with a leading member of the Heathen community and I have contacted a Hearth in the East Midlands. The website of this Hearth makes it plain that the members do not consider themselves to be aligned with *neo-pagans* who base their spiritual belief and practice on Wicca and Christianity, but is a Reconstructionist Hearth keen to build their lives around the veneration of the ancestors and the practical ways of living of the Anglo-Saxons and Norsemen in Britain, as understood from primary sources from that time. More recently, by joining in with an Asatru study group I have had opportunity for conversation with Heathens.

Other places for research have been internet groups interested in the work of Alan Garner, a forum for a Druid group in Leicestershire and a group for Witches that

live in Cheshire. As stated, Facebook has also been explored as social media sites are now so much at the forefront in British life. There are a number of sites for Witches, which seem to have intermittent use.

## **Conclusions**

My analysis of the data gathered has led me to suggest a reason for the development of contemporary Paganism in Britain, but I am aware that there are other avenues for exploration and areas for debate about the activities and lived reality of these practitioners. My overall thesis in relation to identity formation does not and cannot express or represent all of the meanings that have been proffered as a part of this research, but can only enable an interpretation as to why Pagans feel that they 'come home' to the religion. In the opening quotation of this chapter Cox describes the scholar of religion as someone with the aim of describing, fairly representing and interpreting what identifiable communities say, do and believe. My concern throughout this thesis has been to undertake all of those things in as balanced a way as possible, via a continual reflexive process.

## Chapter Four: Contemporary Pagans ‘coming home’

Contemporary Paganism in Britain is a relatively new religious phenomenon, which has taken shape gradually over the past two hundred years, and is still in a process of formation. Contemporary Druids look back to the Druid Societies of the eighteenth century (Hutton, 2007) and the origins of Witchcraft have been traced back to the German Romantic movement (Hutton, 1999). In this chapter I offer an outline of some of the key areas of importance to Pagans, and give consideration to some recent developments within the Pagan communities, as a response to Bruce’s (2002) contention that alternative spiritualities display little social significance. I also establish my argument relating to the kind of influences that may give explanation for the phrase ‘coming home’, which is frequently to be heard among newer members of the communities. I give some description as to what types of people practise Paganism and outline the main pathways, defining some similarities and some divergences in belief and practice. I begin to note the desire for connection and belonging that lies at the heart of my main argument, which is that Paganism represents a desire to reconnect the modern dualities of nature and culture, and to establish a sense of enchanted connection to place in response to the conditions of modernity that have prevailed in the West during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. I discuss some of the community ritual activity that binds the pathways and some that is more personal to practitioners. Finally I argue that self-identity formation within an imagined land is key to understanding the relevance of contemporary Paganism within Britain.

Pagans rarely describe what they do as a *religion*, most often describing their lives as spiritual. This stems from a reluctance for practitioners to associate their activity with the more traditional forms of religiosity which for them encompass more

rigid frameworks of belief developed around central texts, with highly structured practice, rules and dogma. I have used the word religion lightly to describe this group of people, their activities and understandings, in order to provide a flexible framework for discussion.

In a modern world that expects that a name will indicate shape and cohesion the label of Paganism remains confusing. Discussion of Paganism can only ever start with an understanding that, as might be argued for many lived religions, this is an umbrella term for a diverse reality that gives some indication of the beliefs, rituals, practice and philosophy of those people that identify themselves as Pagan while acknowledging that there is no central text upon which the religion as a whole is based, there are no specific dogma, no rules, no direction to specific belief. Individuals construct and interpret their own belief and praxis, although, for some, this is done within a community or group setting, where a certain amount of agreement is discernible. Harvey (1997) has given a comprehensive account of the various main groups within British Paganism, their practices and rituals, which this chapter will not try to replicate. The intention of this chapter is to offer an introduction to contemporary Paganism in order to enable the contextualisation of the argument that follows.

Pagans often state that when they became, or realised that they already were, Pagans, the feeling was that of 'coming home' (Harvey, 1997, p. 192). They have not had to intellectually learn a set of stories, or rules, or laws to be a part of the religion, they have simply recognised that the label *Paganism* encompasses the beliefs that they already hold and provides a meaningful framework or worldview. In the following chapter on fantasy literature, particularly using the novels of Alan Garner as a lens, I establish my argument as to the kind of influences that may have caused those beliefs to

grow, so that practitioners already are enchanted before they recognise a worldview through which to express that enchantment.

### **Contemporary Pagans**

During the period of this research I have attended many and various Pagan events in the north, middle and south of England, and have engaged with Pagan practitioners of different pathways. Throughout that time I have not discussed Paganism with any practitioner who was not white. I have made note of every person I have observed at events who are of a visible ethnic minority. There have been three, two of African-Caribbean appearance and one who appeared to be of South East Asian origin. One of these was a stallholder at an event, selling copies of ancient Egyptian artefacts and may have been there solely as a trader.

In terms of age ranges, the participants that I have formally interviewed have fallen into a range between late twenties and mid-sixties. My observations at events record similar age ranges, although there were a good number of attendees at Witchfest 2011 who appeared to be in their early to mid-twenties. (Witchfest is an annual gathering at the Fairfield Halls in Croydon that bills itself as the largest Witchcraft festival held in the world). In terms of gender mix, I have not observed any discernible imbalance between the participants; there are many women practitioners and there are many men.

The Pagans that I have spoken to have included professionals as varied as journalist, police officer, teacher, hypnotherapist, university academic, and social worker. These are professional occupations that are performed by educated and qualified people. Many of them fall into the category popularly known as 'the caring professions'.



My observations over a decade indicate that a large proportion of Pagan practitioners in Britain are white. The national census that took place in Britain in 2011 provides figures for declared religion but at the time of writing, there has been nothing published that correlates declared religion with declared ethnicity so it remains difficult to quantitatively estimate the number of Pagans that are white (Office for National Statistics 2011).

Berger et al conducted research among Neo-Pagans in the USA via a lengthy questionnaire between 1993 and 1995 including data relating to ethnicity declared by practitioners and stated,

Our study, like all previous research on Neo-Paganism, finds that most Neo-Pagans are Caucasian... the Neo-Pagan movement does not have many African American or Latina/Latino participants (2003, p. 29).

They claim that of 2000 respondents to the questionnaire 1,896 declared themselves as white, which represented 90.8% of the total. While there are no similarly-gathered figures available for Britain, during my observations over a lengthy period I did not discern anything notable to make me consider that figures in Britain are likely to be dissimilar. Berger et al also gathered data that showed 'Neo-Pagans on the whole have higher education levels than the general American population' (2003, p. 31), which also corresponds with my observations in Britain.

In terms of religious experience prior to recognition of Pagan identity, Christianity appears to have been the religion that most of my respondents had received as children and, in secular Britain where many citizens describe themselves as Christian without necessarily attending church or following any specific practice (which Sutcliffe and Bowman have referred to as 'belonging without believing' (2000, p. 3)), it was

notable that the majority of these respondents had been actual practitioners of that religion. The types of comments that were made to me were:

I was brought up in the Church of England tradition – school and church. I wanted to be a nun at 13. I rejected it completely at 14 – the Bible and everything. I found it insulting that you couldn't be good or moral without being a Christian (CW).

I was originally an active C of E [Church of England] Christian (PE).

I was baptised Methodist. I went to a High Church of England convent for a short while... and it took me three years to get expelled (GH).

I remember I'd been brought up as a Christian and I remember sitting under the hairdryer when I was a child and trying to reconcile my belief in Father Christmas and the magic and enchantment of that with the Story of Jesus which also brought a sense of mystery and enchantment. I couldn't really reconcile the two because I still believed in Father Christmas (DI).

Being brought up in a Christian family and going to a church school and having more questions than answers and being told to shut up too many times because they couldn't answer. That would be about the age of six. I tried very hard to get to the bottom of it all – so I got more religious because I felt if I got more religious I'd understand it more and the answers would come. I wanted to be a nun. I'd gone as far as I could with the protestant church so I presumed to find the answers I'd become a nun. I took instruction from a priest thinking when I came of age I'd become a nun (JA).

Having been raised a catholic... no longer (JE).

I was baptised Roman Catholic. My father's family are English/Irish; my mother's family are Spanish – all Catholic. My mother's family also have connections and relatives in South America who are clairvoyant mediums, which goes against most Catholic beliefs... so I was brought up mainly Catholic with a strong 'esoteric/spiritual' leaning. Went to an all-Girls Convent High School. When I left – I moved as far away from Catholicism as possible. It never felt right to me (ME).

I was christened and brought up as C of E. By my late teens I was pretty well atheist (RI).

I was baptised a Catholic and subsequently confirmed as Church of England with the name of a Roman saint. I married the vicar's son, who got bored and sloped off three years later. In disgust at discovering myself, as a divorcee, akin to the Whore of Babylon, I became involved in the Women's movement. I met with a group of feminist Christians and discovered the Motherhood of God. It was a small step from there, via the Green Party, to Paganism (TE).

What is notable in all of these responses is a sense of disillusionment with Christianity, which I would also describe as a disenchantment in the sense that a lack of wonderment is implied. Some of the key words used are *rejection*, *insulted*, *disgust*. There is also an undercurrent of rebellion against that which was received, which is displayed in positive attempts to be expelled from school, the embracing of feminist political activity and the challenge to received wisdom. A positive current of desire for genuine spiritual commitment accompanies these feelings of rebellion exemplified by the intention to further spiritual experience by becoming a nun, choosing to become more religious, 'discovering' the Motherhood of God and attempting to reconcile different stories. There was a discernible requirement from all of the respondents to be religious, although their received religion had failed to provide for this requirement. As individuals educated in a modern, rational world, Weber might have expected that a result of their intellectual development would have been for them to negate spirituality, however the respondents displayed the desire to actively engage in a spiritual life, alongside, or even synthesised with, their intellectual frameworks.

*Paganism* is a label that attempts to provide some shape and a framework to the beliefs and praxis of various groups of participants, including people who further sub self-identify as Witches, Druids, Heathens, and shamanic practitioners, although each

person's conception of what they mean by their label may not be the same as the next person using it. It also gives definition to practitioners that are not group members but prefer to practise more privately or alone. The use of the word 'Hedge' usually indicates someone with this preference, for example a Hedge Witch ( Beth, 1996). Other practitioners prefer simply to describe themselves as Pagan, making no further categorisation of their own practice, or describe themselves as *eclectic* which indicates that they acknowledge that they incorporate ideas and practices from a variety of sources.

The use of labels such as Witch, Druid or Heathen indicate that some kind of categorisation is taking place. I shall therefore initially describe broadly what Pagans believe and do, and during the following chapters define each of these pathways in more depth to show points of divergence.

### **Contemporary Pagans and belief**

Contemporary Pagans do not all believe the same things. There is a joke within the community that if you ask ten Pagans the same question about their beliefs you will receive ten different answers. Although this is delivered humorously, it is also delivered with serious underlying intent. Pagans see their appreciation of difference as a strength. Taking a broad-brush approach it *is* possible to give some general outlines about a Pagan worldview in which all living things are interconnected via a network of energy. Living things include areas of nature that are not generally considered to be living, within the scientific community or the wider world, such as rocks, streams and seas, as Pagans very often hold an animist worldview and recognise the existence of other-than-human persons (Harvey, 2005). Pagans see themselves as part of this system of interconnected natural energies with the ability to influence, and be influenced by, the

energy flows that occur in the web, via interventions. As CW described it to me: 'The acceptance of the world and us as one whole being and all part of each other.' These interventions in the energy flows are described as magic, or often as *magick*, following a community convention of seeking differentiation from the connotations of legerdemain that the word magic holds within wider society.

Believing in the central importance of the natural world, many Pagans are actively interested in, and engaged with, initiatives to support and protect the environment. The landscape is felt to hold its own energies, and specific locations have their own specific energies that are often described by Pagans as 'a sense of place'. The feeling of personal connection to the land, or to a particular place is certainly of great importance within Druidry and Heathenry, but perhaps has lesser relevance for those who identify themselves as Witches, for whom other elements of Paganism hold more relevance – notably gender issues relating to notions of divinity, where the goddess holds as much importance, or possibly even more, than the god.

Many Pagans express the idea that there is one great-interconnected divine entity but that it is represented by the energies in many things. ST, a non-aligned Pagan (i.e. he does not identify with any one particular pathway) told me:

If anything I would class myself as a polytheist. I've always felt that if somebody believes in a god who am I to deny that god? So I talk to people who believe in Asatru and all sorts of different paths and if they believe Odin exists that's up to them and I don't see why I should deny that. I can certainly see there are lots of gods out there. I firmly believe in that but I think overall probably the Earth is as great a god as we get and I have a little bit of sympathy for that Gaia belief that the world created everything more or less really and is there as a divine being and probably as high as they get. I do really. What I was looking for was something that really reflected my love of the country really more than anything.

JA, a priestess with a traditional Witch coven, said:

I don't believe in the god and goddess. I believe they're a representation. I believe in one almighty power. A balance of male and female. We have to look after the Earth for the Earth to look after us. I could get hung, drawn and quartered for saying I don't believe in the god and goddess. I also believe that the magic that we do work is pure Earth magic. I believe we are the first ever religion but of course we've adapted. It comes down to basics. We are the followers of the first religion ever. We follow the seasons and we only take what we need.

ST and JA's comments illustrate several significant points about Pagan belief.

Firstly that many Pagans, while acknowledging the wholeness of the divine, like to represent that wholeness through a multiplicity of gods and goddesses. Although ST calls himself a polytheist in an attempt to acknowledge the beliefs of others, he then goes on to express a personal monist belief in the Earth as one divine being. JA perceives the god and goddess figures as representations rather than as individual divinities. There are those though that are followers of the goddesses Isis, Hecate, Athena, Ceridwen, and those that follow gods such as Odin, Thor, Manawyddan, Pan and Apollo, and many others. Druids address the divinity as a male and a female – the Lord and the Lady, while Witches prefer to address the paired divinity as the goddess and the god. Many of the gods and goddesses cited come from old mythologies, such as those of ancient Greece, Norse, Irish and Welsh.

Secondly, for the majority of Pagans, there is a fundamental belief that the divine is represented by both genders, and that both genders represent the divine. The emphasis of which may be the more important alters dependent upon the version of Paganism that may be being practised. For Witches the goddess is usually the more significant figure, as represented by, and channelled through, the High Priestess during certain ceremonies. For Druids there is more of a balance and different divine figures

are given different emphases dependent upon the ritual. Within Heathenism, which looks to Norse mythology for its significant stories, the gods have previously been given precedence but goddesses are becoming more prominent and, as Pete Jennings – a former president of the Pagan Federation, and a practising Heathen – told me: ‘I believe the path is growing, and appeals to more females now than in its original male dominated form.’

Thirdly, for many Pagans the power of magic is genuine. In Chapter Eight I examine the differences for Pagans between magic, which is a means of expressing the will, magicality that represents enchantment – a sense of wonder towards the supernatural other-than-humans of the secondary realm (often called Otherworld), and how practitioners combine these to create their enchanted worldview.

Fourthly, Pagans often acknowledge intellectually that it is unlikely that contemporary Paganism is a continuation of a much older, pre-Christian religion in Britain, but then express an underlying belief that it is, as JA does in her reference to the first ever religion. As an example, in response to my question,

Is your perception then that the Druidry practised today is some continuation of some historical Druids from time before mind, or do you perceive it as a new religion?

AD answered:

Both, because in most senses it's patently the invention of the last 300 years, or more specifically the last 60, as it's morphed and twisted. And to look at the rituals that are used – if you think that Bronze Age and Neolithic Druids were using these rituals you probably need your head examining. It's just a ludicrous claim to make, but the whole impulse behind it is that network connection again. OBOD's got its own connections to the Otherworld and to the web and you can have any pattern you like in the web, that's the nature of webs. If the web was like an MRI scan of the brain and you got OBODies coming together to do

their thing and its lighting up their networks, then the whole thing would look like this part of the brain was being stimulated and I'm sure the earliest shamans doing whatever shamanic things they were doing would have lit up that sort of area if it was being turned into an MRI scan. So at that level yes, they're doing the same thing but at the actual content - dream on.

Lastly, ST's comment regarding it not being up to him to deny another person's god reveals a respect for difference and for the beliefs of others. Many Pagans in their conversations display similar attitudes. Respect for life itself extends to respect for others. This kind of acceptance of the religious beliefs of others also denotes an underlying consideration among Pagans that all religions are versions of one religion. That is the one that JA refers to, and which Witches in particular call, the Old Religion. To use a metaphor, Pagans perceive many streams of belief but consider that they all feed into and feed from, one river of the divine. This forms part of the holism that Pagans perceive as part of their worldview.

Having an imagined connection to the land of Britain through ancestry also forges a powerful area of belief for many Pagans, particularly Druids and Heathens, in the sense that such ancestry establishes bonds of belonging and roots individual practitioners through continuity into a new type of community that is not necessarily geographically clustered (more specifically for Druids), and within an older community that is geographically based (more specifically for Heathens).

Pagans conceptualise themselves as the protectors of the land and the environment and often become involved in environmental protests as a result. Very recently, in the summer of 2013, a number of Pagans formed part of the protest group at the village of Balcombe in West Sussex, in an attempt to stop exploratory drilling for oil, and to dissuade the energy company Cuadrilla from considering the notion of



fracking (injecting a mixture of water, sand and chemicals at high pressure into shale layers in order to force gas deposits out).

Some Pagans believe in elves, dwarfs, faeries and other magical creatures that those outside the religion might usually consider to be elements of story alone. Many Pagans believe in the reality of Otherworld, a realm that sits somewhere close to this one, that can be accessed via gateways, boundaries, or 'veils' between the worlds, particularly at certain times of the year when those veils are perceived to become less distinct and easier to cross. This secondary domain is not separate from the primary world but forms part of a wholeness of experience. The intertwining of domains forms the Pagan enchanted worldview. Most Pagans express the belief that the world is an enchanted place and that to live within it provides them with feelings of wonder or joy, and many Pagans have expressed moments of particular joy very often related to the feeling that being in a particular landscape has engendered within them. For example AD told me: 'Communion with land is paramount.'

### **Contemporary Pagan activity**

How does whatever particular Pagans believes affect what they do, both in terms of specifically religious practices and in their day-to-day activities? Most Pagans follow the seasonal round of the year, celebrating festivals that arrive regularly as the year progresses. The development of the year is seen as mirroring the spiritual development of the individual. Different traditions may use differing names for any particular festival but there is a consensus about the dates on which festivals fall. Some traditions, such as Heathenry, celebrate festivals which are only celebrated within that tradition, such as Summerfinding, Winterfinding, and Mother's Night, even though they augment them with festivals borrowed from other sources (Jennings, 2007, p. 92).

Witches celebrate the phases of the lunar calendar, as well as the solar, calling these celebrations Esbats, as opposed to the solar Sabbats.

The main festivals, following the seasons, are often represented as the 'Wheel of the Year'. This description also indicates a symbol that is of great significance to Pagans – the circle, which indicates the continuity of time, space, life and death.

There are eight main festivals in the Wheel of the Year, which begin, if a circle can be said to begin at any particular point, with the festival of Samhain that starts on October 31st and lasts for eight days. This is considered as the end of one year and the start of another, following the old Celtic calendar in which the new year began on November 1st. Samhain is a mysterious time falling, as it does, in a season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, during which Pagans believe the veil between this and Otherworld is thin and therefore more easily passable. The end of the year is celebrated by considerations of that which has gone before, including ancestors, and they are welcomed to the festival in the same way that the living are. Photographs of dead relatives may be placed on altars (many Pagans maintain their own altars upon which they place items of personal relevance such as stones, leaves, feathers and candles and particular items that reflect the season that is being celebrated).

This is followed in December by a winter festival. Heathens call this Yule. Druids celebrate the winter solstice as Alban Arthan (The Light of Arthur). Most Pagans will celebrate the ending of the winter and the turn back towards the summer on or around December 21st, regardless of whatever they may call this time. M wore a tabard with a symbol of the Sun on it as he played the returning spirit of the Spring in the Druid Winter Solstice ritual held at Chalice Well gardens in 2010. After the circle was cast, inviting in the four elements, there was a ritual cutting of the mistletoe with a golden sickle, and a white sheet in which to catch it. The mistletoe was broken into

pieces and placed into four baskets, to represent each of the elements, and handed round to all participants.

The story that mistletoe was of significance to ancient Druids comes from Pliny The Elder (XVI 95). He discusses the cutting of the plant with a golden sickle by a white-clad priest. Despite the slimness of evidence about the importance of mistletoe to the ancient Druids, contemporary Druids have embraced the mythology of the plant as being of central importance and honour it every winter for its perceived encompassing properties to be able to heal. It is known as All-Heal.

In early February, generally around the 2nd, the festival of Imbolc is celebrated, which is a celebration of the very earliest stirrings of the spring and renewal, as represented by the arrival of lambs. This festival is generally dedicated to the goddess Brigit (Bridhe). KB described her experience with a snowdrop that she had on her altar to honour the goddess at this time, which opened up while she was sitting meditating. She was filled with a sense of wonder at its opening even though her logical mind felt that the heat from the candle that was burning close by may have caused it to open. The significance of the flower opening to her was an act of connection with the divine. She was able to combine both a magical and a scientific understanding of what had taken place. This apparently small act is of significance in the attempt to understand what Pagans are doing. A disenchanted and an enchanted worldview are being synthesised; cultural understanding and the natural world are being brought together in a way that makes both of them meaningful to the practitioner.

In March, the time of the spring equinox is celebrated under various names, such as the Wiccan Ostara or Druidic Alban Eilir (The Light of the Earth). The earth settles into balance, and the festival is a celebration of personal balance. Pagans will often find a personal space in which to celebrate this festival quietly, such as the Men-an-Tol stone

in Cornwall (a holed stone which may provide a gateway to the Otherworld) which enables a quiet communion with all the others around them, leaves, stones, breezes, those that have gone before.

The next festival is generally considered to be an important one, falling as it does, on the opposite side of the wheel to Samhain. It is the May Day celebration, usually called Beltane. This is a time that is symbolic of the burgeoning of fertility in all things – plants, animals and humans. It is a time of joy and playfulness. ST is a Pagan and a Morris Dancer and he considers his dancing to be both a pleasurable entertainment and a way of celebrating the May at this time.

On or around June 21st the summer solstice occurs, and the sun begins to move back towards its winter position. This is a time of thanksgiving for the sun at its zenith and the positive outcomes that have occurred during its travel to this position. Druids congregate in the car park outside Stonehenge in the darkness of a chilly night before moving quietly across the landscape towards the stones and filing inside the circle to engage in ritual celebrating the summer sun.

At the end of July and beginning of August, a festival of thanksgiving for the harvest takes place. Some Pagans call this Lammas after the old Anglo-Saxon festival of Loaf-Mass, while others call it Lughnasadh, celebrating the Irish god Lugh. Some Pagans engage in baking home-made bread to mark the festival. Others may simply enjoy the warmth: ‘sunbathing with intent’ (DI).

The final festival of the year falls at the autumn equinox, on or around September 21st. It is again a time when the earth settles back into balance and Pagans celebrate it as a time of calm within their lives. Having made one complete revolution, the wheel begins again with Samhain.

Not all Pagans celebrate all of the festivals. They will not celebrate them in the same ways. Each Pagan will have a personal way of celebrating the power of nature. Within the three-grade teaching course that the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids provide for members there are a number of written rituals. The teaching materials make it clear that these rituals can be used as they are, adapted, or not used at all. Individuals have the freedom to celebrate in their own ways. The rituals of Wicca are more fixed. They are constructed, or passed down (some Wiccans see their religion as a new one, with influences from older traditions, others see the religion as based on traditional Witchcraft the esoteric knowledge of which was passed from ‘old Dorothy Clutterbuck’ to Gerald Gardner and then re-formulated by him in conjunction with his most renowned High Priestess: Doreen Valiente). Rituals within Heathenism can be more strictly followed depending upon the practitioner. Some Heathens follow a strict reconstructionist path replicating as best as they can the ritual activities and ways of living as revealed in the *Poetic Edda* (Larrington, 2008), the *Prose Edda* (Byock, 2005), and the *Icelandic Sagas* (Smiley, 2001). These documents form the most important surviving collections of medieval Scandinavian literature. The Poetic Edda was copied in the 1270s by an unknown Icelandic writer and preserved in the Codex Regius (the King’s Book now preserved in a museum in Reykjavik).

The Poetic Edda is a collection of poems of unknown origin that capture some of the scenes from old Norse myth and legend. It formed an important source for the Prose Edda, which is believed to have been collected or authored by Snorri Sturluson, the son of an Icelandic chieftain, who lived in the late 12th Century. The Prose Edda is the most extensive source for Norse mythological stories and it also contains tales of heroes and legendary warriors. The Icelandic sagas are prose narratives that contain family chronicles and short humorous tales, the authors of which remain unknown.

The provenance of the Poetic Edda is unknown, and the believed author of the Prose Edda, Snorri Sturluson, is known to have been a Christian. Academic views of an early pagan way of life in Northern Europe, based on these manuscripts, therefore take into account that the interpretations are potentially filtered through the viewpoints of medieval Christianity (Smiley, 2001, Introduction).

The interpretation of contemporary Heathen practitioners, while seeming to look back towards pre-Christian times, relies on these documents that were written in medieval times, based on older oral traditions, and that may not have the degree of contextual accuracy that Heathen practitioners may envisage.

Some practitioners will meet up to celebrate festivals, and will do so in a fairly formal way, while others will meet informally. Still others will celebrate alone. This celebration might be fairly simple. In Chapter Nine I discuss in more detail some of the quietist activities that ‘hedge’ practitioners undertake.

This outline gives a short introduction to some of the more formal activities that Pagans undertake, while some of the answers I received about how Pagans actually express their beliefs showed the everyday activities that Pagans felt were part of their praxis.

### **Everyday activities**

AD said: ‘My beliefs colour everything I do from dozing in the sunshine to earning a living.’

Here the integrated Pagan worldview is being acknowledged. Belief is ever present throughout all aspects of the practitioner’s life, from engaging peacefully with nature to the practical aspects of life. AD works within a creative environment and sees that creativity as inspirational.

CW (on practising magic) said: 'In groups. Very rarely individually. To do what? A better world. Ease suffering. Aid healing.'

She acknowledged that in her religious practice community was important, as was teamwork, and she valued positive action being taken to achieve her goals. Those that she listed: to improve the world and ease suffering, are not far different from the response that might be expected of a practising Christian and is indicative that some values within Paganism may have been received in early age and carried with them into their new religion.

### *Mantle of the ancestors*

Partly because of my frequent Anglo Saxon re-enactment activities at Sutton Hoo I have become more interested in that side of Heathenism (PE).

Dressing up in styles of clothing from previous ages in order to try to more fully experience the sensations of living within a perceived past, is an activity that appeals to many Pagans and can be seen at moots and rituals as well as within formal re-enactment societies where medieval style dresses mingle with flowing capes, and horns may be used as drinking vessels. It is a way of reinforcing the values of the past, as they are understood to be, within the present. It enables the incorporation of belief and expression. For Pagans it is a way of literally taking on the mantle of the ancestors.

### *Care*

We have healing days once a month (in the temple) (GH).

This comment is an illustration that caring for, developing, and extending others, are integral aspects within Paganism which are incorporated into the everyday world through the professions that Pagans have often chosen – nursing, counselling, and teaching. Care is integral to Paganism and also reveals itself in the consciously Pagan

engagements that practitioners make: environmental protests against the destruction of trees, or the building of roads, teaching workshops held in deprived local communities freely offering development in knitting or sewing or art in order to extend the skills base, instigating programmes of support for other Pagans in prison or in hospital, getting involved in tree-planting programmes.

### ***Independence and informality***

24/7. We live it, breathe it, everything we do is designed to fulfil the craft. We work with herbs for healing and for working magic. I personally do all that I can to help anybody who's interested in the craft to learn. I'm fanatical that if they want the information it should be there. But I'm not looking for converts. We spend 24/7 – both of us, trying to get across to people that we're just people that nobody should be afraid of - not unless I'm angry. I think we're a lot more tolerant towards other people because they're not very tolerant towards us, or they haven't been. We're always willing to listen to what the other person has to say, whether it be about life or religion – it doesn't matter. We're also conscious that we're on show 24/7. Once people know you're Witches they watch your every move. We also organise our lives around the Sabbats and the Esbats as well. When you do something all the time it's - difficult to separate it out. Yes - it is - very difficult. I also start the day off with a daily dedication at the altar which I don't think all Witches do. If we come across a problem we're more liable to sit down, light a candle and look for guidance. First off I ask the guidance of the goddess and god, which, as I say, for ease, I think of as Artemis and Apollo, this ginormous entity then which is both male and female. I ask for guidance. Most days I will sit and commune with them. It should be every day. Case of having a cup of tea, lighting my cigarette, sitting down at the altar, lighting candles and the incense. I tell them about fears that I've got, worries I've got, people I'm worried about and what I would like to happen for the day and then I sit and listen and they tell me what I'm gonna do that day and it's the ideas just come into your head – you know, a particular way of dealing with a person (JA).



Here JA is expressing many of the underlying conceptions that are fundamental within Paganism: that it is an encompassing worldview, with an expressed intention that true seekers will find the religion and no one should be cajoled or persuaded into it. Respect for the beliefs of others is integral. There is an underlying unease for some practitioners regarding the responses that the wider culture might make towards them which leads for some to a desire to remain private. Even though some elements of knowledge within Paganism are intended to be esoteric and mysterious and available only to practitioners, the shyness that some practitioners adopt is not necessarily about the occult nature of their activities but rather more centred in a sense of self-preservation against some of the prejudiced stereotyping that occurs when labels like Pagan or Witch are being used.

JA struggled when explaining her religious practice to me because of her difficulty in separating out consciously something that has become integrated into her whole way of life. The notable point was that her religion is integral to all that she does. Although she is a Witch, a pathway within Paganism that is traditionally more concerned with rules and structure than the others, she is an example of those Witches who practise in their own ways, and she can create a sacred space in which to sit with the god and goddess, with a candle, a cup of tea and a cigarette. Independence and informality are often of importance to many Pagans in the ways that they engage personally with divinity. Their divine figures are immanent, approachable and conversational. They are not distant, transcendent and majestic. No hierarchical framework of intermediaries is required to act as liaison with a divinity who is happy to chat over a cup of tea. These gods and goddesses are personal, close, and available. They are other-than-human. They are advisors and counsellors and can be approached almost as senior members of a family might be.

## ***Being fully human***

JE told me:

So the thing that appeals to me most about paganism is it's not 'pie in the sky'. It's about being here now in this body, this time, this place, fully human. A lot of patriarchal religions reject the body and the earth and women. So women celebrating and revering stuff is very important to me in that earth based tradition. I'm in a group that meets about every three weeks. We've been meeting - I don't know - about ten years. It's very very important to me supporting all that I do - that we do together. Part of that is learning tools – like any craft – you have to learn how to do it really. I suppose building community is part of that action in the world and helping people to do their personal change. When I do therapy I often do a little energy work beforehand and gratitude afterwards. I also try to connect with my deep self and the person - I find people who examine the self connect with the deep web of life. I run workshops on different things not just explicitly spiritual things.

Paganism for JE makes her *fully human*. She describes what that is by saying it is about being here now in this body, this time and this place. These are three key anchors – three points of location in space that give JE her sense of identity and inform her understanding of who and what she is. Anchoring in this way is an important underlying theme within Paganism as the Pagan worldview, not necessarily consciously, is composed of elements that are designed to form connection with time (past, present and future), and place, and to draw together the natural into a sympathetic symbiosis with the cultural. The religion is also a space for JE in which her gender becomes part of that integration. This is of core importance to many Pagan practitioners, of both genders: it allows for the female, which in other areas of the wider culture is still viewed and interpreted as separate or lesser, to merge into that symbiosis and thereby effect the smoothing out of the lines of division that have been encouraged by the dualistic viewpoint of the wider culture in relation to gender.

## *Symbiosis*

Key words appear in this comment by JE that appear frequently in Pagan language and these are community, healing, respect and connection. They all form part of the symbiosis that Pagans seek.

When I first got into this it was something I had to do – doing ritual, doing spells (not so much doing meditation). At some point I got out of that and realised that every decision I made came back to that. I don't do everything I do according to my beliefs and feel guilty. So maybe the answer is it affects everything. My husband is green – environmental first and spiritual second – but with me it's the other way around. I'm lazy really and a well-trained little consumer. There's a political side to me as well, but I've started to think that the only way to vote is green, because it's to protect the land. Consumer power is the only power we have – if enough of us use it it's massive. I do a job that doesn't really have spiritual impact at all – it has political. It sits with my ethics, but it's not enough. Could I earn a living part-time and do some work with Tarot? It's part of who I am now and I have to act accordingly. Sometimes I don't feel I'm being spiritual enough cos it's sunk in so deep. But that's how it should be – spiritual and material fused. You couldn't do your spiritual work if you weren't in your body – you know, here (KB).

KB's comment reveals again, like JA above, that practitioners find it difficult to separate out belief and praxis. Their religious belief permeates and integrates their actions: spiritual and material fused. It 'affects everything.' It is integral to their sense of identity. It anchors them. It also illustrates how consumer power (culture) and a spiritual connection with nature are being drawn together in an attempt to achieve symbiosis.

## *Desire for the non-rational*

They make me more respectful, and very aware of my shortcomings in not behaving as well as I should on many occasions. I spent time communing

with the elms at the bottom of the garden, sheltering under the beech in rain, sitting in the apple tree and a longing for wild nature (PN).

This comment from PN indicates the animist understanding of the world that is central for many Pagans. In this case, trees are acknowledged members of the community, offering protection and comfort and there is an acknowledged desire to connect with nature. It is this *desire* in an educated and intellectual person (PN is a teacher) that lies at the core of a rebuttal of Weber's assumption in his lecture on science as a vocation, that all of the members of Western culture would embrace the process of rational intellectualisation and thereby the requirement for the magical would cease. Even though her intellectual mind might have been educated in the practices and understandings of science, she still seeks a non-rational connection with the world as she views it.

### ***Self development within a community***

I suppose the social element is one of the most important. Getting to as many events/meetings as is sensible. So is going to rituals. The coven is particularly important to me because the woman who's leading it is still developing, so it's a nice focused mutual development. The main constraint is lack of time. I do occasionally perform rituals on my own if there's something particularly I want to focus on – but with no garden, and smoke detectors, it's a bit restrictive. I found wafting the besom is a useful way of wafting it away from the detectors (laughs). What should be important if I had the time would be doing The Book of Shadows properly (RI).

A key point in RI's comment is the focus on the social element of being a Pagan. Again this comment reveals a desire for community, for belonging and for sharing. He also talks about personal development in conjunction with another. Development of the self is a factor that is relevant for many Pagans, but RI shows that he considers such development to be more effective when undertaken via engagement with another.

### *Transformation of counter-cultural ideas*

‘I also became, by accident, an amateur storyteller and spent my summers going to hippy camps’ (TE).

In this thesis I go on to discuss in some detail the use that the Pagan communities make of substantive myth stories (in Chapter Seven) and of fantasy literature (Chapters Five and Six), in order to build community and establish a sense of posterity, and formulate an imagined indigenous and historical identity attached to the multi-dimensional space and place of Albion. TE’s comment here foregrounds the importance of story within Pagan communities. Her mention of hippy camps also indicates the ties that older, and arguably influential Pagans, have to the counter-culturalism of the 1960s. Pike (2001), in her analysis of the sources for what she describes as – the neopagan movement – in the United States of America as it manifests at festivals, gives the 1960’s counter-culture as one of those sources, including within this drugs, feminism, ecologism, science fiction and fantasy, and Asian religions (Zen, Tibetan Buddhism and forms of Hinduism). Paganism as a religion is beginning to take its own distinct form and some of those earlier counter-cultural influences have been absorbed and transformed as a part of this. In terms of drugs, for example, for those who identify themselves as shamanic practitioners, an underlying message within the communities regarding the inducement of ecstatic experience is that it is a product of enchantment sourced in feelings of the magical rather than one to be sought via chemical inducement.

Other things that Pagans do can be observed at the festivals and moots. Groups create banners, organise camps, individuals attend talks, undertake studies, write and perform poetry and music, cast spells, meditate, undertake circle dances or spear dances, chant, make mead, create herbal remedies, sell produce and products at festival

markets, make toasts. Some wear clothes designed to specifically mark themselves out as Pagans – Druidic robes, top hats, Goth clothing, tunics – while others do not.

### **Social significance**

There is a rich cornucopia of things that Pagans do that are specifically religious or overtly attached to their religion. As an example of an alternative spirituality, however, Paganism can be examined under the lens of Bruce (2002) who, as discussed previously, considers that a criticism can be made of alternative spiritualities in that while they may hold some relevance for individual practitioners, they are not socially significant, as little occurs within them to cause engagement with the culture outside the spirituality. Part of Bruce's criticism is that there is little discernible structured activity that is designed to engage the wider culture. It could be debated whether a religion may only be taken seriously if it offers some kind of a structured service to the wider community, or whether this is a notion that has been lifted from more traditional religions such as Christianity that may not always be a suitable yardstick for measuring other religions. Nevertheless, it is of interest to note some of the more recent activity within the larger Pagan community that might begin to address that criticism. Chidester, in his examination of religion and American popular culture, makes the point that 'even fake religions can be doing a kind of symbolic, cultural, and religious work that is real' (2005, p. 9). He defines what he considers to be religious work as something that 'is engaged in negotiating what it is to be human' (2005, p. 18). I do not suggest that Paganism is a fake religion but utilise his comments as an answer to Bruce's suggestion that an alternative religion cannot be socially significant. Pagans are acting in ways that negotiate what it is to be human through their rituals and community activities, both within and beyond their own communities.

## ***The Pagan Federation***

An examination of the Pagan Federation website reveals that a number of socially engaged activities are beginning to occur. The Pagan Federation defines itself thus:

Founded in 1971 the PF seeks to support all Pagans to ensure they have the same rights as the followers of other beliefs and religions. It aims to promote a positive profile for Pagans and Paganism and to provide information on Pagan beliefs to the media, official bodies and the greater community.

The Pagan Federation regards membership of any organisations that refuse to support freedom of religion and equality of race, gender, and sexual orientation, as incompatible with our aims, objectives and values (Pagan Federation, 2012).

For many Pagans the Federation represents a body that acts as a point of contact between Pagans, and between Pagans and the wider community. Some of its stated aims are to provide support, advice, and pastoral care for Pagans in the community, including those in hospitals, hospices and prisons: to promote contact and dialogue between the various branches of Paganism and other religious traditions and to undertake an educative role for people not familiar with Pagan beliefs and ways by providing practical and effective information on Paganism to members of the public, the media and public bodies.

## ***Hospital visiting***

A national Hospital Visitors programme is being developed to support Pagans who are ill, for whom a visit from a chaplain of another faith will most likely not be appropriate.

This is promoted through the Pagan Federation website:

Hopefully, there will be people who will read or hear about this who would like to volunteer for visiting, ministry or counselling, (or a mixture of any of them!) and it is those people the service needs first and foremost, but there may be people who can help in other ways such as Nurses who

would be able to take Pagan awareness training sessions into the hospitals where they work or some of you out there may be able to approach their local hospital or hospice to make them aware that a service is available (Pagan Federation 2012).

In practice, any requests made to the Pagan Federation for a hospital visit are referred to the coordinator who e-mails volunteers in the appropriate location asking for attendance.

### ***Prison visiting***

A chaplaincy is also developing to support Pagans that have been imprisoned. JA works as a prison visitor and told me about the people that she had worked with, including a young man who had attempted to commit suicide twice before JA began to build trust and support with him. The declaration on the Pagan Federation website states:

Since May 1997, the Race Relations policy in prisons was extended to include religious discrimination, the impact of which is that anyone who chooses to declare themselves Pagan, or change their religion to Pagan whilst in prison, are entitled to have a Pagan Chaplain if they request this. Paganism is now recognised as a religion by the Home Office for prison purposes, and though management of prisons has now been passed to The Prison Service this recognition remains unchanged. To accommodate these needs, The Pagan Ministry was set up by the Pagan Federation to ensure that where possible, the spiritual needs of Pagans in prisons would be met, and to acknowledge this is quite an important recognition of Paganism itself (Pagan Federation 2012).

The language used on the website is formal, discussing Pagan engagement with the wider community in prosaic terms. There is no element of mystery in this kind of engagement, and what is perhaps remarkable is that this kind of disenchanted engagement is serving to support an enchanted worldview. A significant example concerns recent developments in the police service.



### *Paganism and the police*

Very recently, Pagans in the police service have worked with the Home Office to set up a Diversity Staff Support Association (DSSA) specifically to represent the needs of Pagan police officers and staff, to act as advisors in legal situations involving Pagans, and to educate the wider police service to enable a greater understanding between the wider Pagan community and the police service. The title of this DSSA is the National Police Pagan Association (generally abbreviated to PPA). It is apparent that public organisations in Britain are beginning to recognise that Paganism is a small but significant religion and to give it credence. This is not occurring without some difficulty, however.

PC Andrew Pardy of Hertfordshire Constabulary, a practising Heathen, who is the elected chairperson of the PPA, described the engagement work he and others had to undertake in order to negotiate with the police service in order to gain recognition. (See Appendix A). This lengthy statement is included in full at the end of this thesis as it provides in some detail a picture of the intense bureaucratic processes that are involved in such engagements with state organs, but more interestingly perhaps, it shows a tenacity on the part of some Pagans in forging links to the state to enable acceptance. Such tenacity in the face of the iron walls of the Business Cases and Service Level Agreements that needed to be scaled reveals a depth of desire for some practitioners to bring the religion into engagement with wider society. It is interesting that the State is showing signs of acceptance towards this relatively new religion, but also of interest is the fact that some practitioners are beginning to engage with the State in an effort to normalise and gain recognition of their religion. This represents a significant, even if small, shift for Paganism towards acting within the wider community as represented by the police service. Here some practitioners are attempting to draw together a response

towards the natural and supernatural worlds and engage with a response from the primary cultural one, in an attempt to combine both the enchanted and the disenchanted. This example shows a desire to be offered wider recognition as an authentic religion for some practitioners. For some others this is not significant. Imagined Albion is a place where all the dimensions and all of their pluralities can converge.

### *Interfaith dialogue*

Interfaith dialogue is also an important part of the work of Pagan practitioners. The news section on the Pagan Federation website in March 2012 contained the following items:

Terry Smith, a traditional Witch, was re-elected Chair of the Suffolk Inter Faith Resource (SIFRE) at the July AGM.

Robin Herne, a druid, gave a talk to RE Resource Managers at their annual Southern Regional Group conference. They were later escorted round Sutton Hoo by Terry Smith, who talked to them about the interaction between Heathenry and Christianity during the reign of King Raedwald.

Robin Herne was also invited to talk about Paganism to school pupils in Lowestoft, as part of a whole RE Day featuring speakers from many faiths. This is the first time that a Suffolk state school has been known to invite a Pagan speaker. Previous ventures have been entirely within the private sector.

At their recent AGM Colchester Interfaith Network elected James Parker, a druid, to the position of Secretary (Pagan Federation, 2012).

The extent to which this religion will be prepared to develop in ways that will make it acceptable within the wider society of Britain, and whether this currently small shift of direction is an indication of a move towards a relationship with the State that might signal further bureaucratisation and a potential rise in disenchantment will be a matter for future study. The tension that is perceived to exist between disenchantment

and enchantment is revealed currently by these examples to be moving towards an attempt at symbiosis, which is a significant underlying element in the development of British Paganism. There is an active desire to bring the secular aspects of the primary world and enchanted aspects of secondary dimensions into some kind of harmony.

### **Identity and utopia**

In Pike's observations of neo-pagan festivals in America, she examines the way that festival space expresses and shapes the 'religious yearnings of participants who are searching for spiritual intensity and utopian community' (2001, p. xi). Pike makes the point that American neo-pagans are creating personal identities that are relevant for them in the current time but which are imagined to be rooted in ancient traditions.

Contemporary Pagans in Britain are developing similarly but the question to be examined is, why are these practitioners constructing a religion so rooted in imagined ancient traditions? What conditions may have influenced the desire to develop a fresh religious outlook that is rooted in a particular landscape, and a particular history so far back in time? A core consideration in British Paganism is Britain itself. What do Pagans mean when they talk about *Britain*? In relation to the phrase 'coming home' that is often used by Pagans about their religion, where does that *home* lie, what are Pagans indicating by the use of the word, and where do their understandings of what *home* is come from?

These questions are addressed throughout the following chapters as I put forward the argument that an integral, but largely unrecognised element of the development of Paganism stems from the desire for some people in contemporary Britain to establish a framework for cultural identity that ties together both the spiritual

and the secular into a geographical and historical domain. Self-identity formation within an imagined land of Albion is a key factor in understanding contemporary Paganism.

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter I have established that Paganism is showing signs of developing social significance in that some frameworks of engagement with the wider culture, both with the organs of the state and through less formal means, are taking shape. It is of note that the disenchanted arena of life and an enchanted arena are beginning to work together in an effort to harmonise, and the disenchanted arena is actively working to accommodate the enchanted. The example given in relation to the Police Service however shows that in order to engage it is the enchanted arena that is making the greater effort in order to be accommodated, with practitioners being encouraged to utilise the language and practices of bureaucracy in order to become acceptable within the disenchanted arena. There is little suggestion that the disenchanted arena is attempting to accept or understand the enchanted worldview of the Pagan practitioners – rather that it is efficiently seeking to incorporate it. Only time will show whether such synchronisation will occur without enchanted practitioners gradually becoming more disenchanted.

I have also begun to establish in this chapter that the desire for a meaningful sense of cultural identity is a strong, but often unrecognised, undercurrent that runs through British Paganism. A desire to link into an imagined older identity is key and is often found in older cultural influences: myths and folktales. In the next chapter I consider the importance of the imagined in Paganism and begin to consider the influence of fantasy texts on the development of the core concepts of the religion. I look in particular at the work of Alan Garner, in which he utilises ancient myth stories and supernatural elements that are considered to stem from the ancient past of Britain and

which have been influential on a number of Pagans, in order to tease out themes that are of mutual interest to him as a writer, and to Pagan practitioners.

## Chapter Five: Imagination, fantasy and Garner

Religion is, to a large extent, about narrative and the success of the story (Cusack, 2010, p. 6).

A promising avenue for further research then, is the systematic uncovering of the role of fantasy culture... in dealing with modern problems of meaning... the guiding hypothesis should be, that popular culture neither feeds an unfortunate nihilism and meaninglessness of the type that Weber holds to be the logical outcome of the disenchantment of the world, nor the deep-rooted and unassailable existential uncertainty that traditional Christian religiosity aimed to provide...it is likely instead that meaning will assume dramatically new shapes and that popular culture will play a vital role in its articulation (Roeland et al, 2012, p. 419).

Having outlined what Pagans are doing and saying in Britain today I now examine how the religion is being created. Imagination, and its powerfulness in the creation of Pagan religiosity is a key factor. Pagans consciously consider their religion to be not a new one. Rather, they imagine that the elements that form the central aspects of importance in their worldview, to be a continuation of older pre-Christian religiosity which have continued in an underground fashion through centuries, and are being rediscovered and reinvigorated by them today. They are imaginatively creating a modern religion that enables enchantment, and a sense of belonging to community and place to occur. In calling the religion modern I describe a religion that unconsciously seeks to integrate the tenets of the rationalism of a time of high modernism (a time in which science, economics and the edicts of State were given primary credence), with a contemporary set of understandings that acknowledge the importance of emotional engagements in human life. Pagans are creatively imagining a sacred place and they are using fantasy texts as a part of this process, particularly fantasy that is sited in real places in the primary world but is overlaid with other dimensions. I examine what this sacred place is

as imagined by Pagans. I outline reasons for describing this religion using the term imagined as opposed to invented, and give explanation to why although the intent of the religion may be inclusionary, an unintended effect of its desire for a sense of tradition may be that it excludes some. I examine how fantasy literature that is of Place is the type that particularly appeals to Pagans and use the work of author Alan Garner as an example of this kind of literature in order to provide an explanation of why this may be so. Using his work I distil themes in his novels that parallel those of importance within Paganism and focus on Butler's (2006) argument that preservation of an older version of Britain and its landscape is a key theme in his work, as it is within Paganism. I argue that an involvement with place is integral both within his work and within the imagining of a sacred arena for Pagans, as they seek to tie their identities into this arena as an act of enchantment. This religion is focused in story and draws upon fantasy to shape its developing meanings. This chapter is principally concerned with fantasy literature rather than fantasy fiction in its broadest sense as such fiction as often depicted in visual media such as television or film, during this research was revealed to be less popular with Pagans, although there are certain shows and particular films that seem to resonate. This research showed that a reading of this kind of story was prevalent and may indicate a preference for individuals in creating their own imaginative spaces rather than being presented with the visual representations of others. Examining why this kind of fiction is particularly popular among Pagans is therefore a complex matter, but riddling the elements of fantasy, of whatever kind enjoyed by the individual reveals certain themes.

### **Multi-dimensional Albion**

Pagans are imagining a space that is centred in the place and places of contemporary Britain, but which encompasses more than merely the land and elements of popular

culture. This imagined space is given a number of different names by Pagans but a frequent one is *Albion*. Albion represents a multi-dimensional space that includes the past, the present and the future, a recognition of other-than-human inhabitants, whether they exist in this dimension (e.g. trees) or in another (e.g. goddesses), and an idea of something larger than the individual, that holds collective importance and is meaningful and timeless. Pagans consider that they are continuing a thematic tradition from an older time that has never really gone away. They do not consider their religion as an invention, but as a recognition of something eternal. Hobsbawm defines invented traditions as:

a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past..they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past (1989, p. 1).

Here the thing of note in relation to Pagans is the phrase *suitable historic past*. A good portion of what lies as key in Paganism is the selection of certain imagined histories. The ones chosen are the histories of the Anglo-Saxons in Britain during the fifth to the eighth centuries and the history of Celtic Britain. Both of these histories, in particular that of the Celts, lie shrouded in the mists of time. There is more record of the lives of the Anglo-Saxons than of any Celtic forbears in Britain (whoever they may have been) and Pagans take that which is known in an academic sense and extend and develop those histories creatively. This sense of an ancient background is enriched for them by their selection of the substantive myth stories of northern Europe and of Celtic Britain (i.e. the myth stories of the Mabinogion and of ancient Ireland). The incorporation of these myth stories over a long period of time into popular culture via



books, films and other media is also of significance in relation to the creative adaptations of Paganism.

### **Invention, imagination and authenticity**

In consideration of terms that are of relevance in the analysis of Paganism I have chosen to use the word *imagined* rather than *invented*, and the word *authentic* rather than *inauthentic*. While Hobsbawm (1989) has used the term *invented* in his discussion of how practices that may seem to be aged and traditional are often recently formed; I borrow the term *imagined* from Benedict Anderson (2006) in relation to the constructions of Pagans, as they develop a religion that seems to be both old and new simultaneously. Imagined is a gentler word which is intended to indicate that Pagans do not deliberately or even consciously construct a false invention. Pagans are engaging in the creation of a nuanced envisioning for which imagination is more at play than conscious invention.

In her argument regarding invented religions, Cusack (2010) discusses religions in the West that have been intentionally initiated as fictional. She argues that such invented religions are exercises of the imagination that have developed in creative partnership with the influential popular cultural narratives of the contemporary West, carried through media such as film and science fiction. Those religions were initiated in some cases as deliberate acts to provide, among other things, an ontological challenge to the idea of religion itself. In this sense they may be considered to be postmodern religions.

Cusack argues that invented religions refuse strategies of legitimization such as the argument that the religion is a contemporary strand of ancient wisdom. In the development of a framework for religious understanding built upon visions of the past

Paganism is embracing that strategy of legitimation. Imagining of past histories of pre-Christian Britain is a notion that is integral to the shaping of the religion and is a point of divergence from the types of religion that Cusack describes as invented. The religions that she addresses (for example Discordianism and the Church of the SubGenius), were intentionally initiated to be fake although, Cusack argues, they have subsequently been developed by practitioners who act as if they are authentic. This reveals a difference between such religions and contemporary British Paganism. There is no substantive indication that initiators of Pagan frameworks of activity, such as Wicca or Druidry, considered them as fake at the point of initiation. Paganism is developing in a fluid and imagined way via the engagements and discourses between practitioners and Pagan religious practitioners have continuously acted from within a viewpoint of religious authenticity.

In his discussion of new religions and popular culture in America, Chidester (2005) argues that even if a religion is invented with a postmodernist intent at the point of its creation to be fake, if it subsequently develops adherents who act as if it is an authentic religion, then it can be considered so. Pagans in Britain consider their religion to always have been authentic and act as if it is so. The context of discussion in this thesis recognises Paganism as an authentic religion in these terms. Its initiation has not been a deliberate methodology to offer a critique of modern society. For these reasons it is appropriate to describe it as a religion of the imagination rather than an invented religion.

Appadurai argues that:

the work of the imagination...is neither purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplined but is a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern (1996, p. 4).

The imagination is a *place of process*, and those two words are key in understanding the appeal of this religion for its practitioners. The contested space is where this religion stems from and in which it operates, and is developed. Fantasy literature I argue is a place in itself where anything can happen; a potentially limitless space, that is limited only by the imaginative choices of the reader. I posit that the space between the natural world and secondary dimensions is the place of interest for Pagans, imaginatively considered as Albion. Albion is a place that lies between the enchanted and the disenchanted world and is at once both. Paganism as a developing religion is less a product but rather, a process. It is continually created via means of imaginative engagement with story, place, the natural and the supernatural.

In imagining a religion that is of Albion, Pagans are considering that the stories and histories of that place form a backdrop of tradition to their religion. Glassie (1995) in his discussion of *tradition*, makes the point that it is often intended to be, and considered to be, inclusionary in its effect, but that it often ends up being exclusionary due to that which it does not encompass. I contend that this gives some explanation in answer to Bruce, as to why the majority of observable Pagans are white. Paganism is a religion sourced from perceived historic pasts and mythologies that relate to pre-Christian Britain. Potentially this 'traditional' background will not resonate with someone whose own perceived historic background does not stem from the Celtic or Anglo-Saxon peoples of an early Britain. Intentionally, or not, the 'traditions' of Paganism in Britain may act unintentionally to exclude some.

### **The breadth of fantasy**

Fantasy literature is a genre that is beginning to receive more critical attention from academia, particularly as it represents a complex area for discussion in terms of its

literary qualities, and its presentations of the non-mimetic (that which is not concerned with the operations of the everyday world) It is a particular type of fantasy literature that appeals to Pagans and that they use in the imagining of their religion. Fantasy that is of place is of particular importance in the imagining of Albion. Fantasy literature holds value for Pagans as a place, in itself, of imagination and negotiation, and is important as a link that allows for connection to place.

Fantasy as a genre is a vast territory – many and varied types of fiction are classified under its title and the sub classifications such as high fantasy and low fantasy divide again into further sub-classifications such as urban fantasy, or mythic fiction. Defining exactly what is indicated by the term Fantasy Literature is consequently contested.

Armitt states:

... Disney's *Fantasia* – with its window onto fairy and folklore, magic and superstition, animal allegory, classical mythology, the Gothic, the ghost narrative, and epic fantasy – offers perhaps the closest parallel, within the boundaries of one single work, to the range of fantasy...

(Armitt, 2005, p.22).

She gives an indication of the breadth of different types of story that are classified as fantasy. Todorov shows a clear attempt to give some structure, some framework to what we mean when we use the term fantasy, when he writes:

The fantastic, we have seen, lasts only as long as a certain hesitation: a hesitation common to reader and character, who must decide whether or not what they perceive derives from 'reality' as it exists in the common opinion. At the story's end, the reader makes a decision even if the character does not; he opts for one solution or the other, and thereby emerges from the fantastic. If he decides that the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described, we say that the work belongs to another genre: the uncanny. If, on the contrary, he

decides that new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena, we enter the genre of the marvellous (Todorov, 1975, p. 41).

Le Guin addresses the cultural and personal challenge that this type of story can represent:

For fantasy is true, of course. It isn't factual, but it is true. Children know that. Adults know it too, and that is precisely why many of them are afraid of fantasy. They know its truth challenges, even threatens, all that is false, all that is phony, unnecessary, and trivial in the life they have let themselves be forced into living. They are afraid of dragons, because they are afraid of freedom (Le Guin, 1974, p.36).

### **The uncanny and the marvellous**

The quotation above establishes Todorov's classic definition of fantasy as being sub-divided into the categories of the *uncanny* and the *marvellous*. He posits that the uncanny occurs following a moment of hesitation when the reader decides that the laws of the universe in reality could not be broken, while the marvellous occurs, post the brief hesitation, when the reader decides that the laws of the universe could be broken and therefore considers that the events depicted could actually occur. I argue that it is the marvellous that engages the Pagan reader, because of Pagan acceptance of the supernatural and the enchanted. The uncanny may be surprising but is ultimately disenchanted.

### **Spirituality of Place – the work of Alan Garner**

The major connecting themes in Paganism are a deep reverence for the natural world and all that is in it, both organic and non-organic, a monist belief that all things are connected via a vast web of some kind that may be described as a type of energy, an agreement that the divine (in whatever form it is expressed) has both male and female components that deserve respect, a reverence towards ancestors, a sense of connection

to the land in general and, often a sense of connection with a particular place, a feeling of wonder (that Curry [1999] has described as enchantment), and, in some cases, the practical use of magic. A secondary domain that interfaces with the primary one that is a space in which the magical occurs is also integral to the worldview of many Pagans and is often referred to as Otherworld. I argue that, although not always consciously, the desire to establish a cultural identity that is of an imagined place of Albion is the theme that integrates all of these elements in Paganism. These elements are to be found in Alan Garner's work. During this argument I provide some analysis of those of Garner's novels that were cited by Pagans in order to elucidate those of his themes that parallel, or may have influenced, Pagan worldviews.

Following on from this I discuss how those themes relate to contemporary Paganism and discuss what Pagans have said about Garner's work. As Garner's work makes use of older myth stories to a great extent this begins to lead into a wider argument as to Pagan use of particular myth stories. As his work has been widely published in the fantasy genre I go on to discuss fantasy literature in relation to Pagan readers. As magic, magicality, and a viewpoint of a secondary domain or domains that sit alongside the primary world of experience forms a significant enchanted worldview in Garner's novels, then I discuss these elements in relation to Paganism in Chapter Eight. A thread running throughout the novels is an exploration of the relationship between a scientific rationalist point of view and that of a magical understanding of the nature of things. In Chapter Eight, I discuss this idea in relation to Paganism as the formation of a Pagan viewpoint reveals an undercurrent of desire to heal the divide between cultural understandings of the world and nature. Significantly in relation to this thesis, in Chapter Ten I discuss the construction of identity within Paganism, in which Pagans underlyingly imagine cultural identity for Britain to which they belong,

paralleling that which Garner reveals in his novels – a deep desire for the continuity of that which is imagined as core to the identity of the places of Britain.

### **Alan Garner**

Alan Garner is an author who lives and works in the area of his birth – Cheshire. His early novels are set in and around the area of Alderley Edge. Today, Alderley Edge is more generally known via the media as being a popular and affluent spot for residence among footballers who play for Manchester United. For Garner it is the place of his ancestry. He has traced his forbears living in the area for centuries back and considers his family to be one of the ancient families of the area.

In 1960 his first novel was published – *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (2002a). It was published and publicised in the fantasy genre, and the majority of his work has been seen as fantasy work. This book and its follow-up, *The Moon of Gomrath* (2002b) specifically have children as their lead characters. In other novels, *The Owl Service* (2002c) and *Red Shift* (1973), teenagers and young persons are lead characters. His later novels have adult lead characters. Due to the ages of the leads in the earlier novels Garner has often been seen as a writer for children, although he himself has stated that he never writes with any particular age-group in mind.

Over the years he has delivered a number of lectures analysing his own history, development and work, which have been gathered together and published in a volume entitled *The Voice That Thunders* (1997). He has received many prizes for his work including The Carnegie Medal in 1967 and the Guardian Award in 1968, both for *The Owl Service*.

Pagan readers have cited the first five of Garner's novels as being of particular importance to them. For that reason I will briefly outline these novels in order to distil the themes in them that are of importance within Paganism.

### ***The Weirdstone of Brisingamen***

As indicated by the title of this novel the story involves motifs that are taken from Norse mythology. Brisingamen having been the necklace owned by Freya, a chief goddess in the Northern pantheon, and wyrd being the web of connections that are spun by the Norns.

The story is the tale of Colin and Susan – siblings – who arrive to stay on a farm in a fold of Alderley Edge, with their Mother's old nurse Bess and her farmer husband, Gowther Mossock. Garner sets up the story by telling the Legend of Alderley. In this he expands upon a tale told to him by his grandfather – the story of the sleeper under the hill – a king and his hundred and forty knights that lie in magic sleep awaiting

until the day will come – and come it will – when England shall be in direst peril, and England's mothers weep. Then out from the hill these must ride and, in a battle thrice lost, thrice won, upon the plain, drive the enemy into the sea (2002a, p. 13).

The hill in question is Alderley Edge, which rises distinctively from the Cheshire plain.

The magic that holds the King and his knights in sleep, so that they cannot grow old and die before the destructive spirit Nastrond rises again, is held in Firefrost – the Weirdstone of Brisingamen, that sits on Susan's bracelet.

The majority of the magical characters in the book, the Morrigan being a notable exception, take their names from Norse or German mythology. The Morrigan comes from Celtic Irish mythology



Throughout this book Garner shows a deep knowledge of, and engagement with, the area around Alderley Edge. The place names he uses are real – Saddlebole, Macclesfield, Mobberley, and the landscape is infused with the magic that the children both work for and against.

In this novel the areas of significance in relation to Paganism are the location of the story: a real place in central England, the legend of Alderley that utilises the idea of the sleeping king under the hill (obliquely referencing Arthurian myth), the incorporation of magic and the magical world, and the utilisation of characterisations from the same mythologies that are central to British Paganism: Norse and Celtic.

### ***The Moon of Gomrath***

This book is the follow up to *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*. Again the setting is the area around Alderley Edge. The focus in this book is on the ‘Old Magic’, the wild magic that contrasts with the ‘High Magic’ used by the wizard Cadellin:

the Old Magic is not evil: but it has a will of its own. It may work to your need, but not to your command. And again, there are memories about the Old Magic that wake when it moves. They, too, are not evil of themselves, but they are fickle, and wrong for these times (2002b, p. 90).

Secular processes in this world represented by building works have accidentally released an old, dangerous magical creature imprisoned for centuries in a pit – the Brollachan, which must be recaptured. The children unwittingly call up the Einheriar of the Herlathing – in the book a group of wild hunters, named partially after the dead warriors of Valhalla and after the Wild Hunt – by lighting wendfire on the Beacon on the Eve of Gomrath. Throughout this book the magical names used are a mixture of those taken from Norse, Celtic and West Highland mythologies.

Although the leads are children there is a high level of maturity revealed in this novel. When the wizard Cadellin is trying to explain to Susan the dangers involved to the children from the Old Magic, he says:

We do not have to avoid you for our safety, as elves must, but rather for your own. It has not always been so. Once we were close; but some little time before the elves were driven away, a change came over you. You found the world easier to master by hands alone: things became more than thoughts with you, and you called it an Age of Reason (2002b, p. 37).

Later in the novel the Hunter appears. Garner's description of him is very like that of Paganism's Herne The Hunter:

He was huge and powerful, yet with the grace of an animal; at least seven feet tall, and he ran effortlessly. His face was long and thin, his nose pointed, and nostrils flared; his eyes night-browed, up-sweeping, dark as rubies; his hair red curls; and among the curls grew the antlers of a stag (2002b, p. 107).

Susan's response to the Hunter is a deep, emotional one. Garner's description of this experience is in contrast to any rational response that might be considered in the Age of Reason:

Susan looked at him and was not afraid. Her mind could not accept him, but something deeper could. She knew what made the horses kneel. Here was the heart of all wild things. Here were thunder, lightning, storm; the slow beat of tides and seasons, birth and death, the need to kill and the need to make. His eyes were on her, yet she could not be afraid (2002b, p.107).

The writing in this section is portentous in tone. There is a sense that Garner is trying to capture something spiritual, something that is understood in a way that is not only of the logical mind. There is a mythic and enchanted quality to the writing.

The key themes in both of these books are the particular mythologies that Garner chooses to use – Norse and Celtic, the legend of the sleeping king under the hill, magic

and the Otherworld that lies close to the primary one and is at once removed and a part of it. Garner uses a recognisable landscape in the primary world as his setting and, while utilising a magical landscape that is capable of provoking deep feelings of connection, he also challenges the secular world with comments about the Age of Reason and its impact in splitting the enchanted secondary world away from the primary. This disjunction between magic and science is also reflected upon in the novel *Elidor*. Paganism is a created religion that seeks to establish its own authenticity by basing it upon Norse and Celtic mythologies, that imagines the whole landscape of Britain as *Albion*, drawing much of its imagery of this Otherworldly place from Arthurian legend, that utilises or acknowledges a world of magic and that seeks to bring together the enchanted world (of magic), the natural world, and the cultural world of primary experience (the disenchanted secular experience). I argue that these key themes and motifs in the novels parallel Pagan concerns and may have influenced practitioners.

### *Elidor*

Unlike the previous two novels *Elidor* starts in a slum-clearance area of Manchester – a dark, dirty wasteland. The four children in this story enter the magical world of Elidor via a ruined church:

Wasteland and boundaries: places that are neither one thing nor the other,  
neither here nor there – these are the gates of Elidor (1975, p. 43).

Elidor itself is a grim place, from which the light has been taken, and the children learn that only the song of the unicorn Findhorn can return that light. This holds a significance in this world because, as Malebron tells Roland:

Our worlds are different, but they are linked in subtle ways, and the death  
of Elidor would not be without its echo in your world (1975, p. 37).

The children are tasked with hiding the Treasures of Elidor within their own world in order to keep them safe. These are a spear, a sword, a cauldron and a stone. They represent the treasures that guard the four castles of Elidor – Gorias, Findias, Murias and Falias. The Treasures hide in this world as everyday objects of the sort that might be found on a demolition site: a rusty railing, crossed laths, a cracked cup and a keystone. In this novel Garner has borrowed names from both Irish and Welsh mythologies, using the treasures of the Tuatha De Danaan, and the hill of Vandwy. The idea that objects in the primary world may also be invested with magicality reflects Pagan imaginings.

In *Elidor* Garner explores the idea of the break in the relationship between magic and science as two modes of understanding. The energy field of the Treasures in this world interferes with and distorts the energies of science. The television ‘screams’ and the picture rolls, the car engine starts and runs without the use of the ignition, the electric razor and the food mixer operate even though they are not plugged in. Whole areas around the children’s home are affected and the electricity company is at a loss to fix the problem.

The children understand that it is magic that is causing the problems while the adults, as represented by their mother Mrs Watson, look for a rational explanation for the inexplicable: ‘You know there must always be a perfectly simple explanation for everything that happens’ (1975, p. 79).

Hutton says of magic:

The classic definition of magic employed by modern scholars is that formulated by Sir James Frazer at the opening of the twentieth century: practices designed to bring spiritual or supernatural forces under the control of human agents (1999, p. 66).

In terms of Paganism it is useful to extend this and define magic as the utilisation of the will to effect change via a network of connections, but by either definition, Roland uses magic both to create and to destroy the door into the Mound of Vandwy. Malebron explains to Roland how to do it:

Make the door appear: think it: force it with your mind. The power you know fleetingly in your world is here as real as swords... Now close your eyes. Can you still see the Mound in your thought? (1975, p. 35).

Similar key themes are present in *Elidor* to those in the previous novels: mythology, and magic, and notably Garner flags up that the Otherworld is linked to this one 'in subtle ways.' The unseen connection between the world of the fey and the primary world is an important concept in Paganism, with its perception that other dimensions are integrated with this one through place. The use of the fairy tradition within Garner again reflects his usage of Celtic imagery.

### ***The Owl Service***

*The Owl Service* (2002c) marks several changes in Garner's work. It concentrates solely on one mythology, Welsh, with the entire story being developed around the tale of Blodeuwedd, and the perpetual struggle between her husband Lleu Llaw Gyffes and her lover Gronw Pebyr.

The location of the tale is an unnamed Welsh valley – remote and self-contained. Teenage step-siblings Alison and Roger are staying in a house inherited by Alison from her father. Garner places emphasis on connection to the land by those who are the protectors and keepers of it. When Gwyn is talking to Huw Halfbacon, the handyman (and also potentially the wizard Gwydion, the creator of Blodeuwedd in the *Mabinogion*) who has upset the family and may get the sack, he says:

‘You don’t own the place, man.’

‘Don’t I?’ said Huw. ‘Oh, their name is on the books of the law, but I own the ground, the mountain, the valley: I own the song of the cuckoo, the brambles, the berries: the dark cave is mine!’ (2002c, p. 104).

In the first two novels Garner has expressed this sense of deep connection to a place through the Cheshire landscape, the landscape of his own family. In this novel he expresses similar feelings via a Welsh landscape, which allows for greater exploration of the insider/outsider divide. The insiders – Huw and Gwyn – have a magical connection to the valley. There is a hint that the spirit of Gwydion remains always in the valley, passing down through the ancestry of Gwyn’s family. Gwyn learns as the story unfolds that Huw is his father. This family’s whole sense of historical identity arises from their belief that they are bound to the valley; its protectors. By contrast the father and son, Clive and Roger, whose ownership is based on the secular conception of ownership – through money – show no feeling for the location at all. As the novel progresses and tensions mount they come to like it less and less:

‘I’m sorry, Dad. This house: I feel I could put a bomb under it.’

‘But look, if it’s as bad as that we’ll go home. I wanted us to have a holiday, not a ruddy breakdown.’

‘Perhaps it’s the weather,’ said Roger.

‘Could be, could be. These hills get a bit on top of you, don’t they?’  
(2002c, p. 199).

After Blodeuwedd, acting through Alison, has flung a copy of the Mabinogion at Gwyn and it has disintegrated, he says to Alison:

‘What was it like? You read it, did you?’

‘Bits. They were short stories. Fine if you like that sort of thing – wizards and blood all over the place.’

‘Don’t knock our National Heritage, girlie. Them old tales is all we got’  
(2002c, p. 63).

There are two notable points about this exchange. First is the support for a 'National Heritage' that Gwyn expresses. The capitalisation that Garner uses indicates the importance of the concept. Gwyn follows this with a comment that reveals the importance of old stories. The second notable point is the apparent confusion of who 'we' are. Is Gwyn speaking on behalf of just the Welsh at this point, or is he including Alison, and thereby the English, in this grouping? Exactly whose National Heritage is being spoken of? In this novel the confusions of identity are explored. The English are represented by Alison, Margaret (her never-seen mother), Clive and Roger. Alison and her mother represent a higher class than the wealthy but snooker-playing, lower middle-class Clive. Nancy and Huw are Welsh, while Gwyn is Welsh but attends grammar school and has aspirations to become something more than the servant class. He alternates between being on a social and national level with Alison, to being somewhat less (her mother refuses to let her see him as he is not suitable), to feelings of superiority: 'He stumbled along the mountain. I'll show them' (2002c, p. 176).

Gwyn fools Alison with a joke about short-legged sheep: 'It's an old Welsh custom!' he gasped. 'Called – called Soaking the Saxon!' (2002c, p. 138).

In his earlier books Garner uses a mix of mythologies taken from various of the cultures that have historically existed in Britain. In this book he chooses just the one and uses it to flag up the confusions in national identities. Sometimes the main characters act as one group and sometimes they are divided by their English and Welsh identities. Alison gives Gwyn a gift of a small owl ornament that she has bought from a local shop.

'Greetings from the Land of Song,' he read. He turned the box over. 'A Keltikraft Souvenir.' And then the small lettering at the bottom. 'Made in England' (2002c, p. 147).

In *The Owl Service* (2002c) the sense of confusion of national identities in Britain parallels what is happening in Paganism as it strives to draw together strands of imagined ancient communities to present a contemporary identity that is of a larger imagined place of Britain, as part of a search for a feeling of belonging. I argue why this may be so in Chapter Ten.

### ***Red Shift***

This book (1973) is set around the area of Mow Cop, a village that lies on the Cheshire/Staffordshire border. Within, three different stories are developed, each set in different time periods, but in which there is a sense that all three are happening at once. The book starts with the story of Tom and Jan, a couple in their late teens. Tom lives in a caravan with his parents. His father is an army sergeant and his mother a housewife. Tom is an intellectual, studious person and there are obvious difficulties in the relationship as his parents cannot understand him. Jan is a trainee nurse who has a distant relationship with her parents.

The second story concentrates on Macey, a member of the Roman Ninth Legion, and several of his compatriots, that are separated from the legion and are forced to go 'tribal' in order to survive. At this time the area around Mow Cop is contested territory between two tribes – the Cats and the Mothers. The legionaries destroy a village of Cats – Barthomley – in order to steal what they need to go tribal, making it appear that the Mothers have conducted the raid. Macey is significant in the book as he experiences frequent bouts of some kind of madness during which he goes berserk and becomes an effective killing machine for the legionaries. During these bouts Macey 'sees' visions, and the suggestion is that he is seeing Tom in the contemporary world. There is a connection between them.



Macey is also significant in the tale in that he has a Neolithic stone axe. This is of spiritual and magical significance to him. Macey eventually buries the axe, which is found centuries later by Thomas who is a character from the third tale in the book.

The third story is set at the time of a real event during the English Civil War, when villagers of Barthomley were massacred by royalist troops. In this tale Margery is married to Thomas Rowley who, like Macey in the previous tale, suffers from visions, and is aware of his connection to someone else during the times when he experiences them. Thomas finds the prehistoric stone-axe buried in the mound on which the church stands. He and Margery eventually place it in the chimney of their house to protect against lightning strikes.

In both Macey's story and the story of Thomas Rowley there is an acknowledgement that their 'madness' occurs when they are possessed by a God. The girl speaks to Macey:

'When did the god come to you?' she said.

'Did he?' said Macey...

'The god attacked Barthomley in you, and you couldn't be killed.'

'I'm outside when Macey's killing.'

'Then the god is in you' (1973, p.59).

Both Macey and Thomas are seen as characters that have a special spiritual connection with something unknown that shows itself through their apparent illnesses. Some Pagans regard their practice as shamanic. Garner has acknowledged that his view of shamanic practice is influenced by Eliade, and these characters reflect that kind of understanding of shamanic practice.

The stone axe is the talisman that binds all three stories together across time in one place – and while it is the male characters that find and hold it, it is the women characters that feel its sacredness and act as its protectors.

The sacredness inherent in the Cheshire/Staffordshire landscape is another significant feature of this novel:

Macey went to the edge of the trees. 'This,' he called across the ditch, 'for all men, in the name of the keeper of the place,' ...

'They won't touch sanctuary,' said Buzzard...

'It's a Cats sanctuary,' said Face (1973, p. 21).

They went into the birch wood. Every tree had rags tied to it: in a clearing they came to a spring, and around it were offerings of human heads (1973, p. 23).

The importance of belonging to a landscape, and being able to function comfortably within it also forms part of this novel. Although never openly stated from where the legionaries originate, as the story develops it becomes obvious that both Face and Magoo once were 'tribal'. They share the ability to understand the terrain. Throughout the story Logan is never able to go 'tribal' convincingly. He is too imbued with Roman cultural understandings, particularly in relation to military life. When they arrive at Mow Cop and need to quickly find shelter he goes into a hole on the hillside. He has no conception that it is a sacred place for both Cats and Mothers. When Face arrives and sees him he warns: 'Get the hell out of there, Logan, or you're dead' (1973, p. 49).

The shifting boundaries of the identities of the legionaries ultimately lead to the deaths of all of them. Logan kills Buzzard because he refuses to lose his Roman identity. Logan has to be kept hidden away from the visitors to Mow Cop because he is unable to adapt his Roman militarism enough to be believable as a member of the locality. Magoo dies by stepping across the boundaries of sanctuary and into the spears of the Cats. Face understands that they have to die because they have violated the sanctity of sanctuary and of the goddess. He consults the goddess via the girl priestess

who is with them and afterwards returns to his tent 'skriking'. Macey wonders why he is so upset and the girl replies: 'He has lost Rome,' she said, 'and is tribal, far from his tribe' (1973, p.87).

Face represents the grief of all of them at the loss of their identities and any feelings of belonging.

The connection between identity and place is significant in this novel as it examines the breakdown in the relationship between Tom and Jan, one of whom has lived in the same place all of his life and has security of place, and the other who has never remained in one place for long and lacks it. The Roman legionaries are displaced from the certainties of belonging to either place or community with the unexplained loss of the legion and their lack of knowledge of the terrain. The search for identity of place is central to my argument regarding the development of Paganism in Britain and is strongly paralleled in Garner's treatment here.

A distillation of the themes in Garner's work that resonate with Pagans shows them to be a sense of the liminal: a space where the natural, the supernatural and the cultural can meet, an engagement with Norse and Celtic mythologies, concern over the break between magic and science, the 'schooling out' of a sense of enchantment, the sense of belonging to a land, the feeling that there is a truth to be found within story, the grief that arises from loss of identity, and the importance of stone as part of the record of the landscape, touched and seen by the passing generations.

### **The fantastic milieu and indigenous fantasy**

In her investigation into the relationship between the creation of alternative personal metaphysical systems, fantastic narrative and contemporary popular digital cultures, in which she examines the Otherkin (a loosely affiliated network of individuals who

believe they are to some degree non-human), Kirby proposes that the body of fantastic and speculative narrative available across media can be understood to form a fantastic milieu: ‘a conglomerate of interrelated yet discrete ideas that may be engaged with at the discretion of the participant, and yet form en masse a broadly continuous body of ideas’ (2013, p. 1). She argues that there is a complex relationship between speculative fiction and communication media in the creation of alternative metaphysical systems that is a convergence rather than a borrowing. The ideas expressed in Garner’s work are being engaged with by Pagans as thematically they resonate with central themes within the religion and are in themselves discrete expressions of connection to Britain and its older stories, and to multi-dimensional aspects of the landscape. While the focus of Kirby’s argument is on the relationship that exists between ideas of the fantastic and their expression through electronic media, the notion of the milieu of fantasy is one that can be extended to include work such as Garner’s even though it has been received through print-text communication, due to this being a primary mode of communication of fantasy literature during the formative years of many Pagan practitioners. There is a convergence of ideas expressed in his work with those expressed by Pagans in the imagining of the religion.

The complexities of types of fantasy is considered by Attebury, who contends that subgenres regularly emerge, merge or disintegrate within the wide and varying body of literature that is indicated by the designation Fantasy Literature. He describes these as *fuzzy sets* that grow out from well-known and influential sets and argues that if they attract enough reader interest then they may change the centre for the whole genre. He regards *low fantasy* as the most promising, but states that as he does not like the implied pejoration of that term he therefore describes it as *indigenous fantasy*, which he defines as:

‘settings that seem to be real, familiar, present-day places, except that they contain the magical characters and impossible events of fantasy.’ It is ‘fantasy that is, like an indigenous species, adapted to and reflective of its native environment’ (1992, p.126).

Pagans that enjoy Garner’s fantasy seem to relate to it particularly because it is set in places of the primary world, and utilises motifs and symbols that are particularly important in their imagining of a traditional and historical Britain that encompasses and acts as the locus for magical dimensions. There is a convergence between the imaginings that constitute the religion and Garner’s imagining of a magical world located in and around the British Midlands. Garner’s work can be described as indigenous fantasy in the terms in which Attebury describes it.

### **The Voice That Thunders**

As a scholarly man Alan Garner is perhaps one of his own best critics. *The Voice That Thunders* (1997) is an essay collection of the talks that he has given over the years about his books, their backgrounds, and the way that he works. He does not explain the books or what his intention was in the writing of any particular story as, as he explained to me, that is not his role, or indeed even his concern. Indeed the essays in *The Voice That Thunders* outline his many thoughts about his craft, his upbringing, his ancestry, his intellectual status, the local people that he seeks to represent, and the combination of the mythological and the rational that lies at the heart of his novels.

One of the central threads of Garner’s writing is his desire to establish the importance of the links between the area of his birth, his ancestry and his heritage. Butler, in discussing Garner’s work, makes the point that Garner is devoted to ‘the preservation and recovery of a native English, and particularly Mercian, literature...’ (2006, p.27). In outlining her analysis of his work and that of three other fantasy writers

of roughly the same period: Susan Cooper, Penelope Lively and Diana Wynne-Jones, she describes her organising principle as the concept of 'Britishness', which she defines as:

Britishness is not here to be understood as a set of homogeneous experiences and beliefs shared by all those who would consider themselves to *be* British, but rather, as a semantic territory subject to constant dispute and redefinition (2006, p. 99).

She evaluates the writers she is examining as:

British writers whose work reflects the environment (social, literary, and natural) in which they have grown up, and who have between them developed a striking set of representations of life in a country both ancient and modern, cosmopolitan and insular, secular and spiritual – a country, in short, in which Britain and Logres exist in intimate proximity (2006, p.32).

Logres is the name of King Arthur's realm in the Matter of Britain, and by using it Butler is acknowledging the importance in these writers' works of the mythology, links to an imagined past, and perceived magicality of the land of Britain. This also is core in the understanding of Paganism.

The key to understanding Paganism and Pagan interest in Garner lies in these quotations of Butler's as the imagined place that they are seeking lies at the confluence of the ancient and the modern. Glassie (1995) contends that the building of tradition is the creation of the future out of the past linking the vanished with the unknown. Garner, in his work, incorporates the past into the present to create a sense of a future for Britain, and the development of Paganism represents a similar endeavour. This imagined place also sits within a universality of spirituality, with Pagan representations of the *Old Religion* as the one that has existed through the ages which is to be found both in Albion and in other places that acknowledge links between spirit and place. For Pagans in Britain it is also bound into this place in particular and is to be celebrated

here. Paganism is also an attempt to combine the secular world with the world of spirit, and stems from a desire to heal the divide between the dualism of rationality versus imagination. Imagined Albion is a place where all can co-exist.

In her article on the *Stone Book Quartet* Reimar (1989) discusses family as being the ‘reservoir of power’ in this book, but makes the comment that in Garner’s earlier novels (the ones principally indicated by Pagan respondents as being the ones that are meaningful to them) that the reservoir of power lies in place. The importance of Place is the integrating theme in those books and I argue that it is this factor which principally makes them of importance to Pagans. Connection to place and the sense of enchantment arising from a feeling of belonging to something that is larger and more meaningful than the individual I characterise as one of the principal strands in Pagan enchantment.

### **Pagan themes in Garner’s works**

The analysis of Garner’s work above reveals that he engages with a number of themes that may be considered to be similar in content, context and tone to the themes that Pagans often refer to as central to their spiritual understanding and use in the practice of their religion.

### ***Landscape and owning***

Although Garner’s later books incorporate a wider geographical landscape – in particular *Strandloper*, which perhaps marks a broadening out of his understanding that the landscape of his family is part of a bigger and universal landscape, the majority of his books are set in and around his home landscape. His books give recognition to a sentience in the land, and they incorporate a vast network of connections across time, place, membership of families, history, stories, spirituality, song, stone, talismans, ritual

and sacrifice. His lead characters are the owners of place, by which they are of it.

Although craftsmanship is not integral to the ongoing argument in this thesis, there is a sense in his work and in his own discussion of it (1997) that *his* craftsmanship lies in weaving together these strands in order to ensure the continuity of these elements – to preserve the past, understand the present, and protect the future.

Not all the Pagans that I spoke to had read Garner's work, but the majority of those that had, had not read beyond *Red Shift*. Those that had read him had initially done so in their younger years.

People like Alan Garner have had much much stronger impact on me both spiritually and creatively and Garner is the top of that list... no absolute doubt about that – the first among us without a doubt... the very first book I have any memory of reading from start to finish without stopping – was a four-shilling copy of *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*. I was 10. It was a watershed. It's quite hard to really say why but I think in *Weirdstone*, *Moon of Gomerath* and to a lesser extent *Elidor*, Alan Garner was giving me a language of what I felt and experienced and saw in the world around without defining it or saying how it works. It was a vindication perhaps of how I felt the world works in that magic is as close or unknown to us as the other side of a shadow – comments of his – that was absolutely what I felt and he just gave me the words to express it and the confidence to think – a complete fiction is a textbook to define reality – that's what most religious texts are. He gave me a language and a confidence and I said, yeah that's basically the world and that's ok (GM).

There are several areas of note here. Firstly is the emphasis given to Garner as being one of 'us.' For his Pagan readers he resonates so strongly that he is acknowledged as being a part of the group. This occurs even though Garner himself has not expressed any deep religious associations and, in his conversations with me, has distanced himself from the religion that calls itself Paganism. Secondly is the level of respect implied by GM's description of Garner as being 'the first among us'. Garner is



being acknowledged here as a leader, regardless of his own intentions as a writer, with an impact that has not only been creative but also spiritual. Thirdly is the age that GM was when he experienced the 'watershed' of reading Garner. He was 10 and felt that he had been given a language to express that which he already understood about the world around him. In a sense this parallels the experience of 'coming home' to Paganism, where a language and a framework give shape to an expression of experience. GM also expresses a feeling of having been vindicated in his understanding of magic.

Considering that he was just about to embark upon puberty this may have been the permission that GM needed to embrace his understandings and feel that he could trust them, and may be the 'watershed' of which he speaks. He also speaks of *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (2002a) in terms that seem to equate his reading of it with the experience of reading a religious text. These are all significant elements in the links between what Garner conveys in his novels and expressions of Paganism.

### ***Place***

Of all the themes in Garner's work that run in parallel with themes of significance within Paganism, I have argued that the importance of place is probably the most notable. It forms the core of the narratives and is essential within Paganism.

The importance of place to these two books [*The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* and *The Moon of Gomrath*] cannot be overemphasised. Alderley is not simply the setting; it *shapes* the stories (Philip, 1981, p. 13).

Following on from this comment of Philip's about place shaping the stories, place also shapes the framework of Paganism. Garner creates a feeling of deep connection with personal histories and ancestry that is tied into a place.

In response to my asking the question:

Do you think that a proportion of your readership is attracted to all of this because for many people today their own family, history and connection is lost?

Garner replied:

That's plausible. What I can say is that I have long been aware that I am privileged in being able to work and live in the place that is 'mine'. But it had to be a deliberate choice – although 'choice' is not the word. It was more of an imperative. The enforced mobility of people today has resulted in a sense of loss, which is more painful and debilitating than the individuals may consciously know.

This notion threads throughout his novels: the distress of the lost Roman legionaries in *Red Shift* (1973) is juxtaposed with the settled family community represented in *The Stone Book Quartet* (1999) Butler analyses it as:

The predisposition toward the settled and traditional has become increasingly pointed, and the portrayal of the small, self-contained, self-perpetuating community in... *The Stone Book Quartet*, in which names and occupations are handed down from father to son, seems to be offered in conscious distinction to the fluid and migratory lifestyle characteristic of modern industrial society (2006, p. 112).

I argue that the loss of identity that results from losing a sense of the place and the community, and the impetus to develop an identity that indicates belonging, is a powerful underlying drive within Paganism. The community that is sought is a community that represents the whole land, while individuals also seek connections to specific places.

### ***Cultural inheritance***

Garner's concern is not just about the Cheshire landscape however, or even his own particular ancestry. He also has a desire to preserve and develop what he sees as the cultural inheritance of Britain.

We are also concerned in the nature of the Matter of Britain and the need for it to be kept alive by its working and reworking. For me, *Strandloper* is *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The elements of the Matter of Britain are in both (1997, p. 233).

While the word *matter* in the phrase Matter of Britain may be taken to mean the body of literature that contains these old stories, it might also be taken to mean the physical substance of the land itself. Both interpretations are relevant to an analysis of Garner's novels and to an analysis of Paganism. The old stories and the land are part of the same thing. The magic that is invoked by the myth is felt to be the magic embedded in the land.

Arthurian myth is of central importance within Druidry, with its interest in the imagined world of the Celts and for both Garner and Druids is perhaps connected to a serious desire to establish an identity for Britain, based on imagined threads of tradition and imagined histories. In relation to Garner himself, Philip makes the point that:

concern with the 'matter of Britain' can be seen as an attempt to relearn and revalue the specifically British modes of thought which have been usurped by the Mediterranean bias of a classical education (1981, p. 26).

This comment might also be expanded to include the concern of Paganism, which attempts to redefine a Britain that is enchanted against the background of a rationalist paradigm that has seemed to disenchant it.

### ***Connections across time in a particular landscape***

For him, the past is still alive, and so is the future... Time is Garner's most consistent theme, and at the root of all his thinking about it lies the idea that what is important of human life endures, and does not decay (Philip, 1981, pp. 14-16).

Underlyingly one of the things that Garner's work tries to establish is a sense of continuity and posterity. His novels work to tie together the past, the present and the

future and I argue in this thesis that this same desire for cohesion through time is an important strand in Paganism. In order to confront feelings of loss of identity Pagans seek to eclectically gather strands of the past and use them to reshape their present coherently in order to develop a sense of the future, and thereby challenge potential feelings of meaningless.

Exploring the shape of time – through time, across time, the cycle of time, linearity of time – is a concept that is of importance to Pagans in relation to establishing connections to ancestors and to potential successors, and it is a concept that is influenced by their reading, not just of Garner, but by the popular engagement that many Pagans have with certain types of fantasy novel in general.

As Garner has been a contemporary of many of the people influential in the development of Paganism (e.g. Ross Nichols, Gerald Gardner, Alex Sanders and Philip Carr-Gomm), he has lived through similar cultural events. The influence of the Second World War, the counter-culturalism of the 1960s, the move away from popular self-congratulatory notions of British colonialism, the rapid growth in communications technologies, the age of heavy industrialism followed by the move towards a post-industrial era, the development of Europeanisation, and the spread of Americanisation through film, television and music. This contemporaneity of experience may have some bearing on the similarities of expression of ideas. Pagans hold an enchanted worldview that is drawn from a desire to combine successfully elements from the natural world with those from the cultural, and those from the magical, and tie them into a sense of cultural identity that they see as centred in Britain, although it is a Britain that is still imagined as a multi-dimensional Albion.

## Literature of the non-rational

Media representations currently seem to demonstrate a largely twofold approach to Paganism. Either it is seen as being synonymous with devil worship, or Pagans are represented as slightly child-like eccentrics who wear funny clothes and choose to stand in muddy fields at odd times of the day (or night). Considerations, beliefs and activities that stem from a non-rational approach are equated with immaturity rather than being given credence as a sophisticated approach to the complexities of a modern world. Attebury (1992) argues that the fantasy novel sits outside the culturally-defined norm: the mimetic novel, and thus becomes the Other. Paganism also sits outside the culturally-defined norm in relation to religion, with words such as *alternative* being applied to it. The suggestion is that religion is still seen by some as only holding authenticity if it appears to follow a traditional framework. Perhaps the Otherness of fantasy literature and the Otherness of this religion forge an important link between the two for Pagans.

Garner's early novels were published as children's books due to their magical aspects, although as I stated earlier Garner has said that he never writes with any particular audience age-group in mind. The sense of enchantment that Pagans express is often equated with childishness within wider society. Pagans are persons who do not reject the comforts that technologies offer, while they also maintain an enchanted worldview that encompasses the non-rational. Mendlesohn and James (2012) observe that fantasy is often seen as adolescent fiction. They challenge the notion that only one mode of adulthood is acceptable and argue that fantasy arises in response to and contemporaneously with the emergence of mimesis as a genre.

Kirby discusses non-traditional religion as being decoupled from normative assumptions of what is an acceptable religious belief or practice, and says that at the same time relative and subjective positions towards the sacred and the secular have become prevalent and that:

Such positions tend to be pitted in a silent war with more traditional hierarchies of value which might, for instance, denigrate new religions for a lack of authenticity or dismiss fantasy literature as juvenile escapism (2013, p. 7).

Garner's work reveals a strong sense of balance between the rational and the non-rational. When I asked him if he thought that the rational point of view that the intuitive, the magical, the spiritual, the enchanted, has gone away, or is going away, in a secular, industrialised, technological age, he replied:

No. Or at least not more than usual. Nearly two hundred years ago, folklorists were bemoaning the imminent loss of folklore. It didn't happen. What I would say is that 'the intuitive, the magical, the spiritual, the enchanted', is always on the threshold of awareness, and to become more fully aware takes a lifetime and requires a particular combination of personality and experience. Not to be fey, the whole phenomenon could as well be genetic: the nature v. nurture chestnut.

Utilising fantasy as a means of exploring ideas, and imagining and constructing new ways of being in the world is a broadly human activity and indicates a freshness of approach that is confined neither to the child or the adult.

### **Garner and the creation of identity**

For an artist enduring the cultural migraine of twentieth-century life to have the stability, the coherence, of a geographically and culturally rooted world-view is clearly a tremendous advantage... (Philip, 1981a, p. 26).

It is his precise awareness of the meaning and symbolic weight of the words he uses which shapes and makes immediate his cosmological pre-occupations. The questions he is asking – what is our tribe? What are our

coordinates? – are part of an attempt, using words, to identify and isolate a way of thinking and looking which can sacralise our everyday world (Philip, 1981b, p. 107).

Philip's words above encapsulate why Garner's work resonates so easily with some Pagans. He has a geographically and culturally rooted worldview – specifically relating to the island of Britain, and in asking what is our tribe, he represents a desire to tie that identity into the landscape in a way that engenders enchantment. In this the poetic, mythopoeic style of his writing is also significant. In explaining the importance of Garner's work to them, respondents indicated the mythic content and style of expression:

The seamless transition between worlds, the connections between different time-lines, the bitter-sweet characterisation, the underlying humanity of his writing. The freshness with which he takes traditional tropes from folklore/anthropology and goes off on a very individualistic literary riffs – like Blodewedd in Owl Service (very obviously), Tam Lin in Red Shift (very obliquely), traditional Siberian shamanism in Thursbitch (somewhat obliquely) – so that he's addressing familiar themes but not simply retreading them in the way that most 're-tellings' do (AD).

AD is here expressing an interest in *traditional tropes*, which from the stories he cites, are revealed to be Welsh and Scottish, but which are often conflated as tales of Britain.

Engaging, well written and with a mythic component that I love, while firmly grounded in the real world. Dialect writing is excellent and very believable. I was always very drawn to folklore and myth. Reading Alan Garner when about 11 was a formative influence (PN).

PN affirms the importance of the myth, and for her, of the use of dialect. Garner's use of dialect is important in his writing and he has expressed an informed belief that it is a continuation of the dialect of the unknown poet who wrote *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, thus tying the language of his novels in with the language of

Middle English of the 14th Century. The use of language, and particularly local dialect, is a way in which humans can show that they 'belong' to particular places or particular groups. Garner has explored this both in the *Crank Cuffin* section of *Strandloper*, and through the voice of Gowther Mossock in *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* and in *The Owl Service* when Welsh locals revert to speaking in Welsh when Roger enters the shop. He is not part of their group. At the heart of this use of dialect and language is a feeling of community, which signals belonging.

Looking back to Philip above, the important phrase that most reveals what it is about Garner's work that parallels what Pagans are doing is *sacralising our everyday world*. Imagined Albion is this sacralised place.

## **Conclusions**

This examination of the novels of Alan Garner, has suggested that his writing is deeply rooted in a particular landscape, history and sense of identity that establishes his sense of belonging within Britain. The work of Alan Garner represents an arena of enchantment, which is stimulated by use of concerns that parallel those of Paganism as a religion that is rooted in mythology, fantasy story, and a desire for personal connection with a land, although the land under scrutiny may be an imagined and idealised one. As the older myth stories of Britain are an integral thread in Garner's novels, I examine the importance and use of particular myth tales as significant stories within Paganism in more detail in Chapter Seven. I now move from the main areas of interest established by my initial research into Garner: those of place and connection to locality, to a discussion of other fantasy reading that engages Pagans.



## Chapter Six: Books to make spirituality in the world

One of my respondents in the research made a revealing comment about the type of reading that resonates with her as a Pagan. She said that what she looked for when she read fantasy literature was, 'books that make the kind of spirituality I'd like to see in the world.' I foreground this comment in this chapter as I examine more broadly the fantasy texts that were cited, and give some consideration to ones that were not, and why that may be so. I consider Jackson's (1991) argument that fantasy is a literature of subversion, and Sandner's (2004) argument that it is a literature of lost wholeness. I consider whether the texts that Pagans cite reveal postmodernist intent as argued by Olsen (1987) or whether they reveal a level of anti-modernism, as considered by Curry (2014).

After this, citing interviewees, I examine some of the ways that Pagans utilise fantasy. This leads me to argue that fantasy texts represent an arena, a bounded space in themselves that also allow for the boundlessness of the imagination and in that sense offer a liminal space between the primary world and those of other dimensions in which to meet and procreate. I argue that in this they are performing a similar function for Pagans as the imagining of Albion does, and that this is what forges a link between the two for them. In this way engagement with and utilisation of fantasy texts is one of the ways in which Pagans create the spirituality that they want to see in the world.

### **'Books that make the spirituality I'd like in the world' (KB)**

During the last three decades of the twentieth century, many individuals who adopted a self-consciously Pagan identity said that to do so felt like coming home. Perhaps this was due to memories of past lives, or acknowledgement of long-established contacts with the divine, or simply the discovery of a spirituality that perfectly corresponded to their own

instincts and needs. It is also, however, possible that some of this feeling was due to the fact that such people had spent time in their youth reading books of the sort described above... Those works... fed off powerful emotional currents within modern British culture – a yearning for a reunion with the natural world and one’s own imagination, for a spirituality of liberal self-expression and self-actualisation, and for a greater parity and partnership between the sexes, especially in religion – which only strengthened as the twentieth century passed its meridian (Hutton, 1999, p. 285).

During the first decades of the twenty-first century Pagan individuals still refer to the feeling of coming home to their religion, or their spirituality (dependent on which word they prefer to use). The fantasy literature cited is wide-ranging – Alan Garner’s early works get mentioned, as do books by Dion Fortune, J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Ursula Le Guin, Robert Holdstock, Terry Pratchett, Susan Cooper, Dennis Wheatley and Philip Pullman. Also noted are the graphic novels of Alan Moore and Neil Gaiman. General areas of interest cited include occult fiction, folklore and mythopoeia, and ‘every single fairy story in the library’ (TE). The types of books that were cited varied across the differing Pagan pathways. Druids and Heathens seem keen on the genre of fantasy. For Witches the emphasis was on practical aspects of Paganism, along with non-fiction. RI told me that he likes ‘to read intellectual stuff, but lots of books on mythology.’ His focus was on intellectual topics in general. CW’s preference was to read books by leading pagan practitioner Starhawk. JA’s focus was on practical intent. The use of the description *The Craft* for what Wiccans do indicates a pragmatic attitude.

As discussed in the previous chapter, those fantasy texts that were frequently cited by Pagans reflected an interest in place and were not generally surrealist or “dark” in tone in the way that writings of authors such as Franz Kafka (*The Metamorphosis*) or Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein*) are.

## **Romantic or Subversive**

Reading fantasy literature is a way in which members of the Pagan communities establish and maintain enchantment in their lives. Here I define enchantment, for Pagans, as an ongoing sense of creative inspiration and connection to something that is larger and more meaningful than the individual self. This includes the natural world, other dimensions and all things that are perceived as living, whether natural or supernatural. During the course of this thesis I expand that definition to include a connection with place (in Chapters Nine and Ten). The importance of connecting with a particular place and an understanding of the encompassing nature of time are integral to any understanding of Pagan enchantment, particularly because the integrating factor that draws all of the elements of enchantment together for many British Pagans is a desire for belonging. Fantasy literature creates imaginative spaces that sit outside the everyday world of experience. It allows known physical laws to be broken. Time, space, and boundaries are all movable. New social structures can be played with, new philosophies developed. Old social structures can be re-examined and old philosophies poked fun at. Certain types of fantasy literature, such as the work of Terry Pratchett can be playful and resonate with the playful side of Paganism.

Jackson (1991) offers a deeper view. Having criticised the structuralist approach of Todorov for its lack of engagement with psychoanalytic readings of the fantastic, she set out to produce a cultural study of the fantastic and has discussed whether fantasy literature is a literature of subversion. She has confined herself to texts where the ‘subversive function of the fantastic is most apparent’ (1991, p. 9). As discussed earlier the authors of these texts do not include those frequently cited by Pagans. They include Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe and Franz Kafka. Jackson defines the work of writers

such as J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis (authors that are cited by Pagans) as 'romance literature' rather than the 'purely fantastic', arguing that

Their original impulse may be similar, but they move from it, expelling their desire and frequently displacing it into religious longing and nostalgia. Thus they defuse potentially disturbing, anti-social drives and retreat from any profound confrontation with existential dis-ease (1991, p. 9).

The types of fantasy most often cited by Pagans are located and mythic. It seems that for them the reading of fantasy literature helps to provoke a sense of enchantment which resists loss of belonging perceived in the secular world. This is similar to the effect of older myth stories, but fantasy also engages Pagans due to its malleability and boundlessness, producing a space within which individual meanings can be imagined and developed. In this way Pagan reading of fantasy does not indicate subversive intent. It cannot easily be categorised as an attempt at nostalgia. Indigenous fantasy of place contributes to and engages with Pagan imaginings of Albion (discussed more fully in Chapter Ten), which is not merely a place of the past, but reflects Pagan concerns of the present, and incorporates visions of the future. The notion of nostalgia presents an image of the ethereal; a desire for an ungraspable past. 'Nostalgia' holds a hint of mourning and passivity. What Pagans are doing with fantasy literature is based in an active desire to embrace the past, make sense of the present, and offer something to the future. In imagining Albion and utilising certain fantasy literature as part of that process, they are not indulging in wistful peeks into imagined histories but are robustly engaged in constructing a worldview in which they can operate. There is little to suggest that the texts used by Pagans are seeking to subvert, nor that Pagans are. Tolkien's (1978) literary mythic tale *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy is preferred over the type of story that works radically outside the bounds of conventional understanding in the ways

that Kafka's work for instance does. It is perhaps the recognition of the sense of a living and magical landscape, populated with communities of belonging that makes this work important for Pagans.

Sandner posits that the fantastic is both:

a subversive literature that reveals our desires in a fun-house mirror,  
opening an abyss of meaning, questioning the limits of self and society

and

primarily a literature of belatedness, unmoored from reality, innocent, the  
repository of exploded supernatural beliefs, expressing a yearning for a  
lost wholeness, promising transcendence (2004, p. 1).

In this way he is supportive of Jackson's approach but does not state that only the subversive element represents the fantastic. What is significant in relation to Paganism is the phrase *yearning for a lost wholeness*. Although there may be an element of yearning in Pagan engagements with this type of literature, as with the notion of nostalgia, this word carries connotations of inertia and hopelessness. This does not adequately explain the active construction of an identity that is anchored in the realities of the everyday world but that seeks to recognise a greater reality through the imagining of a multi-dimensional place. The imagined Albion of Paganism represents such a wholeness in formation.

Words used by these critics in relation to fantasy literature, particularly that which falls within Todorov's definition of the marvellous, and which seems to be the kind of fiction that engages Pagans, include compensatory, reconciliation, communally, nostalgia, and freedom, and it is likely that some of these are elements of fantasy that initially attract members of these communities but their reactions to these kinds of elements is active and positive. They are using fantasy literature as a space within which these feelings can be explored, given shape and expanded.

## Fantasy and postmodernism

In discussing postmodern fantasy and the relationship between the marvellous and the mimetic, Olsen writes:

And often the conclusion is comic to the extent it implies an ultimate gathering together, reconciliation, an ultimately benevolent universe which is theological. In this way the marvelous narrative is compensatory, looking back to a lost beautiful and often aristocratic moral and social hierarchy that was communally and teleologically meaningful... the mimetic is an essentially stable and compensatory mode in that it shapes experience into meaningful patterns. It believes in a world that is structured, coherent and understandable both politically and psychologically... while the marvelous believes in immutable truth, the mimetic believes in the truth of everydayness and mutability... hovering between... floats fantasy... In other words, fantasy is that stutter between two modes of discourse which generates textual instability, an ellipse of uncertainty (1987, pp. 18-19).

He posits that virtually every mode of consciousness, other than the postmodern, believes in a transcendental signified – some ultimate realm of Truth, some eventual coherence, some *over there* that in the end helps define, articulate, unify, and make intelligible the *here* (1987, p.13, original emphasis).

For Olsen terms such as postmodernist and fantasy cannot be presented as settled bodies of ideas. He posits that in many ways postmodernism continues in the same vein as modernism, as a reaction to the dominant assumptions of the nineteenth century, but with postmodernism, a radicalised reaction. Postmodernism exhibits both negative aspects and positive ones, in that it signals absences but also signals gaps to be filled. The metatext of modernity no longer serves as a unifying force. Now postmodernist writers aim for a plurisignification that strives against unification.

Olsen argues that fantasy is used to liberate the imagination, and is becoming a dominant form of fiction interrogating what is taken for granted about language and

experience and thereby giving shifting or provisional status and is part of a narrative and metaphysical swerve that challenges the premises of the humanist tradition.

In following Olsen's argument that postmodern consciousness does not acknowledge some ultimate realm of Truth or some eventual coherence, I argue that applying the term postmodern to Pagan involvement with fantasy literature is not appropriate, as Paganism is forming from an unconscious desire for coherence and stability. Pagan reactions to fantasy literature are not a seeking of deconstruction.

### **Fantasy and modernism**

In discussing the sometimes radically negative critical responses to Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, Curry (2014) argues that this is a fall-out from the anti-modernism of the novel, which has been embraced positively by large numbers of readers and which therefore challenges the modernist stance of much of literary criticism. He defines modernism as:

the self-conscious articulation and celebration of the chief values and goals of modernity. And by modernity I mean the co-dependent power of corporate and finance capital, the modern political state and modern science...the belief that only science, being dis- or unenchanted, has access to the truth; it is therefore the only legitimate kind of knowledge (2014, p. 163).

He describes modernity as being suffused with irony and involved in the process of de-mystifying and de-bunking. Perhaps *The Lord of the Rings* might be considered, however, as a product of modernism if this is considered in the light of Latour's (1993), definition of modernism as including networks and hybridities. The engagements in *The Lord of the Rings* between humans, dwarfs, hobbits and elves, the involvements between the enchantment of magic and the disenchantment of Saruman's ruination of the forests, and those between the varying landscapes of Middle Earth, represent a vast

network of inter-relationships that are contingent and complex. Middle Earth might be considered both as a product of and a reflection of a modern world in such terms. Pagan imaginings of Albion may also be viewed similarly as a constructed realm that is full of complex inter-relationships between humans, other-than-humans, landscapes and communities. It may also be represented as a construction of and from modernity in the terms that Latour outlines. I argue that while subversive and romantic elements are to be found in varying fantasy texts, those texts that are popular with Pagans are not usually surreal, and therefore not postmodern in intent in the way that Jackson indicates.

Although they allow an individualistic exploration of the non-real the books cited are being utilised by Pagans similarly to myth in that they are seeking a unification rather than a deconstruction. Myth and fantasy allow for idealisation, and idealised landscapes and ways of living, which is of import to Pagans in creating enchantment in their lives.

### **Pagan utilisation of fantasy texts**

#### ***Arthurian fantasy***

Do you dream of drinking from the Grail?  
That the truth is held within a tale,  
And Arthur sleeps now, ready to return? (Smith, 2008c).

The above lyrics are sampled from a popular song within contemporary Druidry and illustrate much of what fantasy encapsulates for Paganism. The element of dreaming, or imagining, the act of taking in from and connecting to that which is sacred, the belief that story holds truth, the connection to an imagined pre-Christian past through the figure of Arthur, and a sense that he, and thereby, the values of that age will return.

Arthurian fantasy forms a core of interest to Witch, Druid and Heathen practitioners. There are elements of good versus evil in the tellings, as represented by Arthur and Mordred. There is the compelling nature of friendship, noble values,



teamwork, honour, respect. The nature of magic is an important element in every retelling of the tale, with the powerful figure of the magician, Merlin, often confusing the issue of exactly who is the leader – the noble and righteous King or the sagacious wizard, or the dynamic combination of the two. Armitt posits that the Arthurian story changes shape and focus to accommodate the society that is utilising it and describes it as ‘satisfactorily indistinct... across which individuals can lay their own projections of heroism, cultural struggle, leadership and romance’ (2005, p. 9).

Those Pagans that cite a primary interest in the figure of the goddess, and female empowerment, very often cite Marion Zimmer Bradley’s *The Mists of Avalon* (1982) as having a distinct effect on the development of their spirituality. Traditional tellings of the Arthurian tale have focused on the male point of view: Arthur and Merlin being the leaders who represent noble values and the positive effects of magical practice, while Guinevere and Morgana represent betrayal and the negative use of magic; with this underlying dichotomy representing values of previous ages in relation to men and women. Zimmer Bradley’s book moves distinctly away from this more usual representation. Morgaine is represented as the central character – a Priestess of the ancient traditional religion with magical powers, who grows up in Cornwall and becomes a Priestess at the Isle of Avalon (Glastonbury). Avalon is an Otherworldly place that can only be accessed through the mists that surround Glastonbury, by those that have the magic to be able to do so. Other than Merlin, the males in the story remain in this world. The priestesses in this book identify themselves by having a crescent moon tattoo on their foreheads. GH, a current Priestess of Avalon, showed me that she too has this tattoo, having been powerfully influenced by this book. CT described the effect that the book had on her:

Despite it's a fictional book I seem to have historical memories of it. Seems daft saying it out loud. Seemed to have a lot more sense than Christianity or any of the other crap that I'd read previously. I've read loads of her books since. It was based on the Tor at Glastonbury and the female being the representation of the moon and the male being the representation of the sun. I've got visions of robes and scrying and initiations and climbing the hill being symbolic of learning, and journeying into other worlds and the earth being a symbolic entity and out of body experiences and things.

CT's list of the things she remembers about the book largely resembles the list of practices that Pagans describe as what they do in their religion. Her response to it is intense in that she regards the story to be almost a representation of a reality than an imagining, with her use of the phrase *historical memories*.

### **Fantasy and Pagan shamanism**

Garner appeals to members of the Pagan communities that describe themselves either as Druids, or describe activities or beliefs that suggest shamanic practice. The term shaman is an academically contested term as it originated among the Siberian Evenk to refer to particular practitioners undertaking specific religious practices (Hutton, 2001). The definition many Pagans use draws heavily on Mircea Eliade's (2004) and Michael Harner's (1990) emphasis on 'techniques of ecstasy' or 'altered states of consciousness' that include journeying to Otherworld, spirit possession, magical practice, meditation, and practical ways of working with the environment, spirit entities and with other people.

I call myself a Witch, but I feel that's a bit show-offy. I certainly wouldn't call myself a shaman for the same reason. My coven was supposed to be Wiccan but was immensely shamanic but the High Priestess had worked with aborigines in Australia for 12 years. We were a bit seat of the pants – not planned and it came out more shamanic than anything (KB).

I work as an artist and storyteller under the name of Creeping Toad and essentially Creeping Toad projects aim to work with people to celebrate places where those people work and live... We find the exciting things in wherever it is you live... For me what I'm doing on a day-to-day basis is a religious... not religious – it's a spiritual practice. It's a personal spiritual practice... My practice is essentially animist practice rather than more structured work. I work in a world that's alive spiritually and consciously. My practice is about listening to that and being actively part of it. In essence that's what my spirituality is. Within that is relationships with particular beings, spirit people and particular deities. Even then how our relationships evolve is equally unstructured but then I've been doing this for a very very long time – most of my life (GM).

Within Paganism the term shamanic is often used to indicate this awareness of and engagement with the living world, including rocks, trees and plants and it tends to indicate a less formal set of practices than perhaps labels such as Wiccan or Druid do.

Other writers of fantasy literature that capture this kind of sensed, but seldom seen enchantment are ones that seem to appeal to Pagans, but not necessarily to the same extent. Susan Cooper's (1984) *The Dark is Rising Sequence* usually gets mentioned alongside Garner, although her work is less preternatural, and poetic. Philip Pullman's (1995) *His Dark Materials* trilogy is set in a world that is similar to this one but is not this one, and its focus is more on the interface between magic and science. Terry Pratchett's lengthy series of books set in *Discworld* does not contain a sense of enchantment in the same poetic way as Garner's, but his playful style is popular with some Pagans who enjoy that he pokes fun at sections of the Pagan communities in a way that allows for self-reflection. For example, in *Equal Rites* (1987) he concentrates on the interplay between the earthy practicality of Witches and the supposed intellectualism of wizardry. Robert Holdstock's (2002) *Mythago Wood* is filled with a feeling of dark mystery and foreboding centred around the wood in the title. Many

Pagans cite the *Narnia Chronicles* of C.S. Lewis as having had influence on them as youngsters and acknowledge the enchantment of the Otherworld that is easily accessed through the back of the wardrobe but indicate that the underlying Christian sentiment prevents a similar enjoyment as adults. J R R Tolkien's (1978) *The Lord of The Rings* trilogy established the genre of high fantasy and is a favourite for some Pagan readers, with its oblique Anglo-Saxon connections. On the surface this is not a tale about this world but about a world that could be this one, but which openly includes magical characters such as elves, dwarfs, and sentient and communicative tree spirits. Again practitioners who consider their practice to contain shamanic elements cite these works more freely.

Pagan readers of Garner are utilising his stories to reinforce a belief in the interconnections in the Life force and acknowledge an underlying belief in the existence of magical creatures and other-than-human entities. In that way they are engaging in what Todorov has described as the genre of the marvellous. The known laws of the universe can be broken. Tolkien's work is similarly approached, whereas other popular fantasy literature is enjoyed and engaged with because it allows the introduction of new spaces and societies that are not necessarily in this world but allow for debate and negotiation about what it means to be human in this one. The works of Pratchett and Pullman perhaps fit more comfortably here. The title of this chapter came from KB, who when asked what she looks for when reading this kind of literature, answered: 'Books that make the spirituality I'd like in the world,' and this is probably the key to a holistic understanding of Pagan response to and use of fantasy literature, including that of Garner.

As discussed not all fantasy literature can provoke this for Pagans, but the ones that practitioners cite frequently are invested with a feeling of enchantment that

promotes and supports feelings of spirituality. Works such as Garner's promote enchantment and have a sense of integrity. There is a feeling of honesty in Garner's work when he writes about shifts between worlds.

### ***Incorporation into practice***

Many Pagans actively cite fantasy literature as being incorporated in their religious practice. For example – leading exponents of Wicca, Janet and Stuart Farrar:

Like many other Witches and occultists, we have found Dion Fortune's unforgettable novel *The Sea Priestess* a goldmine of material for devised rituals and have benefited from the results. So, for our friends' handfasting, we incorporated some of the Priest of the Moon's words to Molly in Chapter XXX of *The Sea Priestess*; we felt they might almost have been written for the purpose (1984, p. 160).

Fortune's novel is often cited for its formative influence on those magical practitioners that engage in more defined ritual practice.

### ***Calibrating separate realities***

DA spoke of the bedtime stories read to him by his mother, citing Enid Blyton's *The Far Away Tree* and his love of 'complete Other Worlds'. A childhood favourite was a 'dusky old tome that smelt old' called 'Spriggans and Treacle'. He described that as he was born in Cornwall he felt he was 'a child of granite'. A spriggan was a fairy – not the Victorian kind – but a guardian of a sacred site. DA related how during the total eclipse in August 1999 he decided not to go to the centre of the eclipse in Cornwall but instead he went to a sacred site and worked with spriggans to prevent damage to the stones.

Therefore as a child are you actually travelling to fairyland, or when listening to Ron reading the Mabinogion? Are we crossing that veil and travelling to another world? There is a definite feeling for me where at first

I'm obviously imagining it but then I lose control of it – it no longer feels imagined – it feels I'm being led.

There are two key points to note here. Firstly, the immense impact that this book had in the formation of DA's understanding of the world around him, that allowed him to accept and appreciate the existence of these magical entities, to the point at which he travelled to a specific location to engage with them in the protection of the land, and of its heritage. Secondly is the process that he is undertaking in calibrating two different worldviews. His logical mind has awareness that what he is experiencing is imagination (from a scientific rationalist point of view therefore not being real in an empirical sense), before he 'loses control of it'. It's no longer imagination. He is *being* in another world. He is able to be in two separate realities at once.

DA's comment illustrates the feeling held by many Pagans that travel to Otherworld is actually possible, stimulated often by the imaginative use of fantasy story. This underlying belief that the known laws of the universe can be broken is perhaps tied in with Pagan appreciation of the type of fantasy literature that closely illustrates Todorov's genre of the *marvellous*. I argue that this is the genre of enchantment.

### ***Fantasy texts as religious texts***

I listened to a conversation that took place at a moot in the South West, during which a Witch talked about the goddesses she worked with, saying that Isis was the more powerful due to having more followers in Britain. When others expressed surprise she replied: 'Haven't you read Terry Pratchett and the point he makes that a god who isn't worshipped fades away?' To which a Druid replied, 'Yes and Moorcroft makes a similar point in his books'. The work of both authors was discussed in a philosophical way with serious heed being taken of their thoughts in relation to the world of the gods.

Fantasy literature for Pagans forms both a site of enchantment and a site that enables thought and discussion as to the right way to live. A fantasy text represents a place in itself, but engaging with it and engaging in that space that arises from it represents process, and is a movement between rootedness and new experience. In the absence of a specific religious text for this religion, this type of literature provides a similar function to a religious text. The difference for Paganism however is that fantasy literature is expressed in many forms and enables a continuous process of thought and engagement. The fluidity and flexibility in the use of differing texts that challenge imagination and thought, prevents the establishment of dogma based around these texts, which is part of their appeal to Pagan practitioners.

### ***Contemporary myth-making***

RI talked of his initial astonishment when younger attendees at a Witch camp had utilised *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (a US television series broadcast between 1997 and 2003) as part of a ritual:

My initial reaction was, 'silly kids,' but when I thought about it I thought well, what's wrong with using a modern myth.

In an article in *Witchcraft & Wicca*, the magazine of the Children of Artemis, Becky a teenage Witch wrote:

Everyone thinks teenagers switch on too much T.V. and switch off their minds, but for me, turning on Buffy turned me on to a whole new way of life. It was through being inspired by the example of my favourite character, Willow Rosenberg, a Witch, that I decided to find out more about Wicca (Issue 03/04, p. 54).

Pagans utilise fantasy stories to construct personal meanings within their religious belief and practice. RI's comment above is notable in two ways. Firstly, in that he directly describes a fantasy as being a modern myth, and in that way indicates one of

the major connections between fantasy literature and older myth stories. They both function as means of creating a sense of community and shared understandings. RI may have meant *contemporary* when he used the word modern, but he may also have indicated the notion that fantasy *is* myth-making in a modern world. The creation of myths for a modern world. His comment, and Becky's, also shows the use, among the younger members of the Witch community, of a fantasy television show, rather than fantasy literature, and this may represent the beginning of a generational shift towards visual textuality rather than the written. As many of the first-generation members of the Pagan community are older in age, the current research showed written texts still to be prevalent, but this may change.

### ***Fantasy creating enchantment***

Fantasy literature, set outside the everyday world, stimulates the imagination and the creative process. For Druid practitioners, the flow of inspiration is a part of their religious practice, and is an acknowledged part of their spiritual inner life. The flow of creative inspiration is formally described by them as 'Awen'. The mythic types of fantasy that are more often cited often hold a similar value for Pagans as do substantive myth stories because they often address similar themes, and it is the immersion in, and combinations of, those themes that create their enchanted worldview. When asked what it was about such literature that draws them, responses often included some element that indicated such enchantment.

Bradbury, because he puts his finger on what it is about life that is awe-inspiring and magical (AD).

I've read 'Mists of Avalon' – that kind of genre of historical fiction. She's often writing about people's Pagan beliefs and practice but in a historical setting. I suppose inspirational reading would be the general heading (JE).



The key words being used by these practitioners are awe, inspiration and magical. The combination of the three represents what enchantment is within Pagan communities. They find it in their religious practice and in these books.

### *Liminality*

Alongside, and intertwined with this quality of timelessness there is another important thread for Pagans, and that is liminality. The liminal is the space in-between. The place that it neither one place nor another: the shoreline, the space between the light and the shadow. In this space that is neither one place nor yet another then anything is possible. For Pagans, this is a space in which magic can exist. Liminality is a thread that often runs through fantasy literature. In Zelazny's *Jack of Shadows* (1971) the lead character is a creature whose magical power is only at its fullest when he is in the shadow – that which is neither light nor dark.

Alan Garner told me: 'Since my first day of school I've felt myself to be liminal.' This sense of liminality runs throughout his work, where the magical is only ever just out of sight. In *The Moon of Gomrath*, Colin is trapped for a time in the ruined Errwood hall that returns to its former solidity only in the moonlight. When a cloud obscures the moon the hall returns to ruin, trapping him inside the magic.

It is in this same complex relationship between geometric precision and an utter sense of the impossible that the essay of fantasy fiction in general is born: a hyperbolic, endlessly expansive desire for the uncontainable, trapped within the constraints of a literary genre in which narrative closure is ruthlessly effected (Armitt, 2005, p. 4).

In this sense the 'complex relationship' in itself might be described as being liminal. Fantasy literature often concerns that which occurs in the space in-between, but as Armitt describes, the being of fantasy itself is forged in the space in between the

logical and the imaginative; that which Todorov (1975, p. 41) describes as the moment of hesitation.

For Pagans the imagined place of Albion is a land of liminality – the space where all dimensions, and persons, whether human or other-than-human, meet. It is at once a timeless and a time-full space. It is a place for a convergence of meaning.

### *Stories to unriddle the world*

Independence of thought is an underlying thread within Paganism:

The Northern Tradition does not have any one great authoritative [sic] book saying ‘Do it like this’ and it means that one of its great joys is thinking things out for yourself, rather than following someone else’s idea (Jennings, 2000, p. 4).

Threads of substantive myth stories spread through fantasy literature and help to shape boundaries and create communal understandings for Pagans, but their appreciation of fantasy represents a step away from myth in that the focus is on the journey of exploration and charting fresh territories. Myth stories are useful in creating a sense of community identity, while fantasy works more effectively in the liminal space: the unknown, half-hidden space. In conveying worlds that cannot be understood through lived experience it runs in parallel with their experience of Otherworld, and is a space in which experience of a secondary realm can be explored and expressed. Creatures that may have been engaged with in journeying experiences (shamanic visitations to the Otherworld) are often described in similar terms to those that are found in fantasy tales. Stepping into a world of fantasy story represents a similar experience to stepping into Otherworld and there exists a loose boundary between story and belief.

## The arena of fantasy

Fantasy texts are place in themselves. They are a liminal space – a space beyond the mimetic (that which is based in the experience of the primary world), forged in the imagination, and containers in which elements that would not usually converge can meet, mingle, and merge. They are a place of endless imaginings, the birthing of new ideas, new beings, new places, and new ways of being. They are a space for the convergence of all things, limited only by the reaches of readers' imaginations. In this sense they function for Pagans as the imagined place of Albion does. Fantasies of technologies, or aliens or alien landscapes in a world outside this one are not the ones that resonate with practitioners. Pagans cite fantasies that establish or create a place that lies in or around this world: Fundindelve, Narnia, Middle Earth. This is the kind of fantasy that Attebury (1992) describes as *indigenous fantasy*. Pagans are drawn to the places of fairy-lore which, as Mendlesohn and James argue, is Celtic in origin.

in this conception, fairy is a separate world that lives alongside ours... In these tales fairies are intimately concerned with humans, and their powers often arbitrary, yet also moral (2012, p.11).

The places and creatures of fairy are the places and creatures of British Paganism. They are the places of home and places of exploration.

Human geographer Yi Fu Tuan (2009) argues that humans need to be somewhere on the continuum of rootedness to growth. Rootedness complete leads to a deadening of the spirit, while transit can lead to growth. He argues that people need both. What Pagans are doing can be described as inventing a tradition or imagining a community or creating a worldview, due to a need to establish rootedness and to visit the place often called Albion to grow through experiences not to be found in the secular

world. They establish rootedness through their chosen mythologies and histories and they utilise certain fantasy texts in order to extend their vision of Albion.

## **Conclusions**

In seeking such coherence contemporary Pagans might be considered to represent a group that is modern in intent as they look for a unified meta-narrative of oneness in the interconnectedness of all things in nature and yet postmodernist in practice, represented by eclectic gathering of ideas and fragmented ways of approaching their central themes.

The sense of the impossible that has the potential to become reality that lies at the core of much fantasy literature runs in parallel with the belief that magic can effect change, and that the Otherworld does exist. Fantasy literature has a similar effect in provoking a sense of enchantment for Pagans. The enchantment can occur as part of the story-making process itself. Philip Carr-Gomm told me, 'Reading the story of Taliesin really fired me up – when I was 15 or 16 I wrote my own version.'

While the use of substantive myth represents a community endeavour, such a collective narrative does not necessarily engender an understanding of the individual's uniqueness, while the use of fantasy does allow that possibility. In seeking to establish an imagined past tradition, substantive myth plays its part, serving to connect the past to the present. Fantasy picks up the mantle for Pagans in that it enables them to connect together the present and the future, and thus establish a sense of posterity, inducing a sense of meaningfulness to their lives.

The fantasies cited as popular by Pagans all encompass a distinct landscape combined with a mystery of time: Garner's Alderley Edge, *The Lord of the Rings* and Middle Earth, Susan Cooper's focus on Wales and Cornwall, Lewis's *Narnia*.

These landscapes represent an anchor in space, with a freedom to move around through time in order to engage with other persons in the secondary realm, or in a different domain of time. Even though *Narnia* appears initially to be a separate space from that of the primary world, it is revealed to be only one easy step away from the everyday world, through the back of the wardrobe.

Integrating a sense of place in the primary realm with that of the idealised realm, while maintaining time pathways through and along the primary and secondary realms, in order to engage with all persons that are of that integrated space, forms a quest to gain a holistic identity that is of place in this primary realm, that acknowledges secondary realms, and that embraces all. This is the enchanted space of the Pagan, in which magic can occur.

## Chapter Seven: Myth and community

We are in mythic time, where everything is simultaneously present...  
(Garner, 1997, p. 205).

Religions are, by definition, metaphors, after all: God is a dream, a hope, a woman, an ironist, a father, a city, a house of many rooms, a watchmaker who left his prize chronometer in the desert... (Gaiman, 2001, p. 551).

The great fantasies, myths and tales are indeed like dreams: they speak from the unconscious to the unconscious, in the language of the unconscious – symbol and archetype. Though they use words, they work the way music does: they short circuit verbal reasoning and go straight to the thoughts that lie too deep to utter (Le Guin, 1974, p. 51).

In a lecture delivered at Bath Literature festival 2004 Professor Ronald Hutton said of myth that it changes society. It engages us with a deeper truth than reality. Lecturing there on the same day was Alan Garner, who, in the essay *Aback of Beyond* wrote:

I am using the word 'myth' not as meaning 'fiction' or 'unhistorical', but as a complex of story that, for various reasons, human beings see as demonstrations of the inner cause of the universe and of human life (1997, p. 27).

Both Hutton and Garner are acknowledging the power that story has to penetrate and re-form ideas and emotion and cause change in human understanding. Earlier discussion of the novels of Alan Garner has enabled the identification of several themes that are relevant in Paganism. One of those themes is the use of stories, characters and names from older mythologies that are favoured mythologies within Paganism itself. In other words myth itself is one of those themes. Within this chapter I discuss the stories taken from the Welsh Mabinogion, and from Irish mythology that are favoured by many Druids in order to show how an interest in Celticism has helped to shape this particular Pagan pathway. Heathens see themselves as contemporary representatives of Anglo-

Saxon life and utilise Norse mythology as part of the framing of that particular pathway. Witches may select their gods and goddesses more eclectically but they often select them from Greek mythology, citing names such as Artemis and Apollo, or Hecate. I begin with an outline of the way that the word *myth* is being employed within this debate before considering why Pagans use stories from older mythologies and why they utilise the particular ones that they do. I then go on to give some response to Rees's (1996) challenge for discussion about the creation and employment of personal myth within the Pagan community.

### **Using the word 'myth'**

A myth is invariably a story. The word myth is often used in contexts where the implication is that the story involved is in some way untrue. For instance popular tales that gain credence as some kind of reality, but for which there is no supporting evidence, are known as 'urban myths'. Pagans, however, do not see the stories that are involved with their religious practice in any way to be a *fabula*, the Latin word for a persistent lie, but consider them rather more as Garner does: as demonstrations of the inner cause of the universe and of human life, without necessarily being fact based. It is often understood that a myth is not conveying something factual, or indeed, rational. There are various contexts in which the word can be used. As previously said, sometimes the word is used pejoratively to indicate the subject is somehow false, or it is used to give a name to a specific kind of a story that has come from an older society and often that is a story about the gods and heroes of that society. Quite often it is used as a descriptor that indicates the conveyance of some kind of a poetic truth – in newspaper and magazine articles Garner's work is often described as mythic, for instance. In relation to Paganism, the specific stories from older societies are important, but possibly

of more importance, are the tales that are used to construct the actual boundaries of the religion itself – the Life Stories (Linde, 1993) that give causality and coherence for each individual practitioner within the religion. Within this chapter I am using the word myth as meaning a significant story. I shall be examining the substantive myth stories (to borrow a phrase from Rees [1996]) by which I refer to particular mythologies, that are significant for Pagans, and I shall examine the personal myths that Pagans utilise in order to shape their individual understandings of what the religion is.

### **Myth and metaphor**

Myth does not work by appealing to a logical set of understandings within individuals but works at a much deeper level of human understanding. Lakoff (1993), in discussing contemporary metaphor theory outlines the classical theory of metaphor (taken for granted over centuries), in which metaphor is seen as a matter of language, not thought. He argues that classically the word metaphor was defined as a novel or poetic expression where one or more words for a concept are used outside their normal conventional meaning to express a similar concept, but he posits that this is false usage because:

The generalizations governing poetic metaphorical expressions are not in language, but in thought: they are general mappings across conceptual domains... In short the locus of metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another (1993, p. 203).

Therefore, the word metaphor has come to be used differently in contemporary metaphor theory. It has come to mean a ‘cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system’ focused on thought rather than language. ‘The language is secondary. The mapping is primary...’ (1993, p. 208).



It is potentially this ability to forge deep understandings from the metaphor in myth stories that makes them significant for Pagans, rather than an actual belief in the god and goddess figures themselves as divinities, but in itself that does not explain why Pagans choose the particular older mythologies that they do as their significant stories.

Members of the Pagan community are aware of the powers of myth and metaphor and the strength of the influence they have for them. At a Druid gathering in 2010, CH talking about myth, said that:

The opening of one's communication to that of another is difficult. So for that we need a poetic language. This is nothing less than the language of metaphor, which is the shared secret of all, awakened by and reawakened by the mythological symbols of our heritage.

She went on to discuss that the old Welsh word for story means guidance and to see. Notable in this comment is the importance of metaphor for her in being able to 'see' but perhaps more tellingly is her use of the words 'mythological symbols of our heritage'. For her it is the inheritance of the perceived truths from those of *us* that have gone before, by utilising a poetic language, which is of importance in relation to myth. This comment implies that a sense of belonging is forged through the sharing of myth. There are connotations of family, tribe and community in the use of the phrase *our heritage*. The voices of those generations that have passed are perceived as being transmitted through the medium of myth.

A thread that ran throughout my discussions with Pagan respondents is the idea that there is one interconnected divinity, aspects of which are represented by gods and goddesses from mythological tales, rather than those gods and goddesses being divinities in themselves. This idea emerged in conversations with some Witches as well as with other Pagans. The belief that both the goddess and god are divine figures is a core belief for many Witches but not all. For instance RI told me:

I don't believe in exterior spiritual entities. I see the god and goddess and various elements as metaphors rather than entities. Despite my scientific rationality I still have a belief in some sort of spirituality or divinity within each of us, which is where I see it being and god and goddess are simply ways I suppose... really... we're not very good at looking inside us... so we project the inside out and then we can focus on it rather better that way.

### **Myth as a significant story**

Myth includes stories relating to significant historical events in a religious tradition, not just to stories of gods.

In origin, the term 'myth' means 'story' and in calling something a story we are not thereby saying that it is true or false. We are just reporting on what has been said (Smart, 1969, p. 8).

Pagans use stories of gods and goddesses to map an outline of the type of Paganism with which they identify. They use them to engage with magic and enchantment, and the powers that individual divinities represent. They also use their own personal myths to create a history for their beliefs and to give an individual flavour to their own practice and their understanding of it. Myth then in these contexts is a significant story. It is created in and works in the exchanges between practitioners.

Perhaps myth also works in the individual as a means of creating the coherence and causality that individuals require in order to build and understand their own self identities, and it may be seen as a contributory factor to the feeling that Pagans relate of 'coming home' to their religion. The significant stories that they have encountered, created or engaged with prior to recognising their religion have been woven into their life stories and resonate with the stories within Paganism so that an almost immediate coherence is formed upon encountering what is to them at that stage, a newly defined religion. The experience of GM outlined in the previous chapter, upon his first

encountering Garner's *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* provides an example of this and lends some explanation to his feeling that Garner is one of 'us'.

### **Story in Pagan communities**

In a religious community that has no central unifying text, story plays a distinct role in shaping loose frameworks of shared understanding. Rituals, music, learning materials, clothing, festivals, magical practice and enchantment, and the establishment of a history are all supported by stories of significance for the practitioners. Bennett (1999) quotes Cohan & Shires (1988, p. 1): 'Stories structure the meanings by which a culture lives.' This is an encapsulation of the importance of story to Pagan communities although different stories are utilised by the various groupings, dependent upon the meanings that are valuable to them. The stories that are important to them not only include the older mythologies that they may have borrowed and often use as a core framework for group identity, but the stories they use to explain themselves as individual Pagan identities. The following sections look in more detail at each of the major groupings and the stories that influence and structure their cultures.

### ***History of Druidry***

Myth, as found in the classical lands of Europe and in the lands of the Scandinavian tradition, is firstly a social belief in an imaginative drama incarnating the forces of nature and having definite social purpose (Ross Nichols – Founder of OBOD – 2002b, p. 193).

There is a fairly well-defined history for modern British Druidry. Druidic societies have existed since the eighteenth century, although it is only since the mid-1960s that Druidry as a Pagan religion has begun to take real shape and form. In 1964, Ross Nichols, who had been the Maenarch or Chairman of the Ancient Druid Order left on the death of its Chief, Macgregor Reid, to set up a new Order – the Order of Bards,

Ovates and Druids. This was to take a distinctly Pagan shape under Nichols, who had spent time in company and debate with Gerald Gardner, the leading exponent of Wicca. Following Nichols' death in 1975 the Order closed down until re-opened in the late 1980s by the current Chosen Chief Philip Carr-Gomm. As a very young man, Carr-Gomm, had been a pupil of Nichols and used what he had learned from Nichols as the basis for the re-opened Order, but he has also developed it during subsequent years in ways that have made it central to Pagan Druidry. Other orders have developed from its membership and it has cast an influence on others further still. The Order has expanded and now has members in many countries of the world.

Nichols had a deep interest in mythology and hoped to develop a mythology for Britain in which town-dwellers and romantic countryside lovers would regain a genuine engagement with the land that sustained them:

Mankind may have grown out of myths simply as explanations of the universe; but its need for myth as dramatization of nature's processes, as shapes to feed the imagination, as foci for seasonal activities, is probably as great as ever (2002b, p. 194).

His vision was that humankind needed to be brought back into a proper relationship with nature:

as active partners with nature in it. This is almost the opposite of wandering about in natural surroundings and dreaming (2002b, p. 195).

The suggestion here is that Nichols was not a supporter of the Romantic ideal, but wanted any myth of the land to encourage a more pragmatic engagement. The subsequent development of the Order has not concentrated on this more pragmatic viewpoint, although it does not discourage such a view, but spending time in natural landscapes, looking, thinking and experiencing can be observed as Druids visit Glastonbury Tor, or the Chalice Well garden in Glastonbury, or at camps in Wiltshire.

ST, from the West Midlands, described the feeling of this kind of activity as:

Sometimes I can sit for half an hour or even an hour just drinking it all in. If you find the right site on the right day I think it can be absolutely magical. I can remember once going up to Mam Tor in Derbyshire. I'd gone alone for some reason. I'd decided that's what I wanted to, I wanted to go to Mam Tor. I actually rough camped for the night and I can remember standing on Mam Tor right at the top at 8 o'clock at night when the sun was setting. I remember feeling I could have been in any other time – 2000 or 3000 years ago.

Nichols' vision of myth being used to shape Pagan imagination particularly around seasonal activities has successfully developed however as can be seen in many of the activities that take place during the Wheel of the Year celebrations.

### *Celticism*

Druidry has very much shaped its identity around Celtic mythology, and around Arthurian legend, although as Leerssen (1996) discusses, the very notion of *Celticism* is one that is subject to dispute: 'its name, by virtue of its very imprecision, can attract all sorts of speculations and prejudice.' He contends that the term Celticism means:

not the study of 'the Celts' and their history, but rather the study of their reputation and of the meanings and connotations ascribed to the term 'Celtic'. To the extent that 'Celtic' is an idea with a wide and variable application, Celticism becomes a complex and significant issue in the European history of ideas: the history of what people wanted that term to mean (1996, Chapter One).

He describes the concept of 'The Celts' as a construct that took place over the period 1650-1850 in a response against the Enlightenment and against rationalism. The framework of Celticism that encompasses contemporary Druidry is not therefore based on a level of historical information in the way that Heathenry is rooted in the information from the Sagas and Eddas, but is a construct being forged from within

another construct. Druidry is immersed in poetry, and the arts, both of which form part of the imagined cultural identity of the Celts. Part of the significant story of Druidry is that the ancient Druids were the religious leaders of the Celts. As a people calling themselves 'Celts' is not known to have existed, then there is little evidence to support this idea or indeed to discredit it. The imagined indigenous identity that is suggested by the term Celt, with its artistic, poetic, emotional and romantic undertones, coupled with a continuing reaction to the rationalism of a modern Britain, seem to be the significant factors in relation to Druidry shaping an identity around a perception of the Celt.

Contemporary Druids are examples of what Bowman refers to as 'Cardiac Celts': 'people who feel in their hearts that they are Celtic' (2002, p. 6). Druidic learning takes place through the examination of that which is perceived as Celtic mythology, by which Druids mean stories from Irish mythology and tales from the Welsh Mabinogion.

The first level of training undertaken by any member of OBOD is in the Bardic Grade, where the emphasis is on inspiration (Awen) and poetic creativity, whether in art, literature or music. The mythical Bardic role model for the Order is Taliesin. In Welsh mythology Taliesin was a great poet, who receives the power of wisdom and knowledge when the Cauldron of Inspiration that he has been tending the fire for at the command of the goddess Ceridwen, who intends to bestow its powers on her son Afagddu, spits out three drops of its magical content onto his hand, thereby giving him the powers instead. Enraged the goddess chases him, each shape-shifting into several forms during the chase, before the goddess finally catches up with him as he is in the form of a piece of corn and she a black hen. She eats him, becomes pregnant with him and, when he is reborn, she places him in a basket and puts him on the river, abandoning him to his fate. He is found by Elffin ap Gwyddno who is to become his foster father, and who notices that the baby has a shining brow. This is the meaning of

the word Taliesin. This story inspires OBOD Druids to think of learning as an initiatory process.

### ***Inspiration***

Inspiration and the Bardic Arts are key factors within Pagan Druidry. They form part of the early training not, as the Order takes care to point out, because the role of the Bard is the bottom rung of a ladder, but because poetic inspiration is fundamental to Druidry. Many of the ideas that are embedded in current Pagan Druidry were inspired by the writings of the eighteenth-century Welsh antiquarian Iolo Morganwg (Edward Williams), whose concern with the preservation of mediaeval Welsh literature and culture led him to produce a number of manuscripts which are now widely regarded as forgeries. His revival and development of the Welsh historical tradition of the eisteddfod, showcasing storytelling, music and the recitation of poetry has influenced the activities of Druidry. At the summer and winter gatherings of OBOD there are regular eisteddfodau held, in which members of the Order are invited to recite their own poetry, play harps, drums or other instruments, sing songs and celebrate Inspiration.

### ***Poetry and song***

The poetry, the music, and the songs are generally related to the themes of Druidry – love of the landscape, love of trees, the activities of the Celtic gods and goddesses. The Chief Bard of OBOD Dave Smith (Damh The Bard) regularly gives performances at these Gatherings, and also performs at Druid gatherings across many parts of the world – Australia, the USA, and other areas in Europe. His collection of songs forms a robust outline of all the themes that are prevalent within contemporary Druidry. These songs are full of references to Celtic mythology. On his website he acknowledges his song *Oak, Broom and Meadowsweet* thus:

This is the first song in my Blodeuwedd trilogy, and was the first song I wrote around a Celtic myth. It has already had a wonderful life – being used as the basis for a large Beltane ceremony in the New Forest, and now sung by many in honour of the Spring Queen (Smith, 2008a).

The lyrics of his song *Cauldron Born* reflect the intent in the Bardic Grade:

Lady stir your Cauldron well,  
Chant your words and sing your spell,  
Deep within the darkened hall,  
Hear the Goddess Ceridwen call.  
Come and taste of the Cauldron's Brew,  
And magic she will give to you,  
You will dance in the eye of the storm,  
You're Ceridwen's Children,  
The Cauldron Born! (Smith, 2008b).

Tasting the brew from the cauldron of the goddess is a Druidic metaphor for tapping into the pool of inspiration and creativity that lies all around.

### ***Ritual***

Some rituals are constructed specifically around Celtic gods and goddesses. Ritual clothing designed to reflect the perceived Welsh history of Druidry such as the white robes that are worn in national eistedfoddau or the time of the Matter of Britain with swords, medieval ladies' gowns with big velvet hoods, or tabards are worn. This is again a dressing up of a perceived past in order to incorporate it within the present.

At the OBOD Summer Solstice celebration held on the top of Glastonbury Tor in 2010 the ritual incorporated the Sword and the Chalice (representations of male and female) and the main participants in the ritual wore medieval style clothing. The sword-bearer wore a white tabard with the symbol of the sun, while the chalice-bearer wore a long red velveteen dress, a circlet around her brow, and a wide belt clasped with a gold-coloured buckle of intricately-patterned design of the style which is known as Celtic.



Contemporary Pagan Druidry and Celtic mythology are inextricably intertwined. Why this is so perhaps links back to Linde's (1993) argument regarding the creation of Life Stories. Pagans are constructing their own spirituality, and in order to do so they need temporal order and a sense of causality. Harking back to this older set of mythological stories gives a framework upon which other aspects of the spirituality can be hung. Possibly the major reason for the use of this temporal framing of their beliefs is to help to construct a community – a community that has a history, an ancestry, a perceived ancient wisdom, and whose members are linked in the present day through that knowledge and wisdom rather than by blood or geographical closeness.

### *Heathenry*

Odin/Woden, Thor/Thunor and other members of the Northern cosmology form the central pantheon of divinities that are core to those practitioners that self identify as Heathen, rather than as Pagan. These divinities arrived in Britain via the influx of Anglo-Saxon tribes and the Viking invasions. Heathenry represents a very small part of British Paganism, with its own distinct identity. As Pete Jennings, a practising Heathen and the first non-Wiccan President of the Pagan Federation, told me:

I believe that Heathens at present only constitute less than 5 per cent of the UK Pagan population, and possibly as low as 2 per cent.

He stated his personal reasons for choosing Norse/ Anglo Saxon sources as:

My name is Norse derived. I live in a Danelaw area and have a strong interest in 'Dark Age' history and re-enactment and most importantly, it fits into my general attitude to life – not wanting things on a plate, bloody minded, independent and not a lot of sympathy for the idea of karma found in many other areas of Pagan spirituality.

His last statement probably gives an indication of how Heathens see themselves to be different from other strands of Paganism and why they choose a different set of

divinities, and use a different label. The Heathen identity holds an emphasis on the pragmatic and that which is believed to be known about specific historical communities, rather than on an interpretation of an imagined Celtic identity and communities.

Jennings gave an outline of Heathenry as:

There is a great tension between modern Heathens, between Universalists (inventing or borrowing practices/beliefs from other paths) and Reconstructionists (trying to act within a historical model, albeit adjusted for modern sensibilities, custom and language). I guess I fall somewhere between the two, but on the Reconstructionist side of the dividing line. I am also fairly unusual in that I regard myself as a Witch in the general sense, something few Heathens seem comfortable with. I define Witch as anyone who attempts to make magic, regardless of the source of their beliefs or practice, and not purely the monopoly of Wicca or Traditional Witchcraft. There are Witches mentioned in the Norse mythology and literature, and of course the first recorded UK execution of a Witch was in Anglo Saxon times (the Witch of Peterborough). Few modern Heathens seem to want to try to use magic, and many do not believe in it.

This statement points to a difference between Heathenry, Druidry and Witchcraft. Heathens use the tales in the Poetic and Prose Eddas and in the Icelandic Sagas in an attempt to establish a historical basis for their contemporary lives. This is in comparison with Druidry that seeks to engage with a mythical, enchanted land. Witches utilise magic as a craft, rather than an enchantment. There is practical intent behind what they do. While Witchcraft and Heathenry both tend more to the practical, Witchcraft is less able to argue a specific history as its origins are less visible.

Heathens seek to establish an identity based on the notion that they have Scandinavian or Anglo-Saxon ancestry, that their gods are from the Northern cosmology, and that their way of living, both ethically and practically, is bound up with the ways of living in these earlier societies. The website of the Five Boroughs, an alliance of Heathens in the East Midlands, states: 'Heathenry is simply the veneration of

our ancestors, the Regin and wights [the gods and the spirits]' (Heathen Alliance, 2011). They address the ancestors through what is known about the history of ancient Scandinavia and the Anglo-Saxons, and they address the supernatural elements through the myths. Within Heathenry there is a belief that these tribes were the ancestors of Britain and that they have been largely ignored by wider society.

It is a great disappointment to many of the Northern Tradition that these native stories are not retold more in school, rather than those imported mythologies of Greece and Rome... It is a pity that the average British person has a very poor knowledge of traditional songs, dances, customs and stories... (Jennings, 2000, p. 5).

Two areas of note in this quotation in relation to this discussion are the use of the word 'native' and the terminology 'imported mythologies'. The implication is that indigenous identity stems from the Northern Tradition, and would be reinforced by the myths, if only they were fore-grounded in wider society. There is an underlying feeling of loss of something essential to being of this land that needs recovering, even though the Northern Tradition is as much an import as the myths of Rome and Greece. The practitioners of the main Pagan pathways do not often exhibit any visible perception that contemporary Britain is as likely to have cultural connections with Roman forbears as with Germanic or Celtic (whatever that might actually mean) ones.

### ***Witchcraft***

The stories that are important within Witchcraft do not so obviously involve a particular older mythology, although certain gods and goddesses names do appear as central. Leading Witchcraft practitioners, Stuart and Janet Farrar (1984), write of the use of the names Cernunnos and Aradia within Wicca, to represent the male and female divinities. JA, the High Priestess of a traditional coven, uses the names Apollo and Artemis as representations. South European mythologies have entered the British education system

via arts and literature over several centuries, but for many Pagans are not seen as part of their indigenous heritage. Their relevance within Witchcraft seems more to be based on the strength of the goddess figures as representations of specific aspects of life that may be considered to be of importance to women – fertility, gentleness, motherhood, the wisdom of women and also of other aspects relating to empowerment. Goddesses are not fore-grounded in the Northern cosmology in particular, and have less relevance than for Witchcraft practitioners.

### ***The Old Religion***

A significant story that appears to be more important within Witchcraft is the understanding that Witchcraft stemmed from Britain, that its practitioners were the victims of the Christian inquisition, and that they were not the wicked perpetrators of the dark arts of magic, as portrayed by the inquisition but were, rather, the powerful women (sometimes men) in local communities that used their magical and herbal crafts to positive effect, and thereby challenged the power of the Church. They were wyse women and cunning men. The actual numbers of women subject to the European medieval Witch-burnings is debatable (Hutton, 1999) but some Witches believe the figure to run into the millions and describe Witchcraft as the *Old Religion* believing it to have had widespread significance before the arrival of Christianity in Europe.

I'm a Witch. Taking the term Witch to mean Wyse Woman. Not that I'm wise but... I don't know if there's anymore I can put to that... just a Witch. I'm not one of those damned Wiccans. I hate the term. I'm also ready to adapt. I'm not so traditionalist that everything has to be as it was in the past – which is why The Craft is still going (JA).

The notion of wyse women and cunning men is perhaps a reframe that allows for a sense of connection back to a time when women are perceived to have been powerful

within their own communities and to have been on a par with men in relation to the skills they possessed to heal and support.

The term Old Religion implies that Witchcraft is a representative of a universal religion that pre-existed Christianity:

Witches hold the view which was virtually universal before the era of patriarchal monotheism – namely, that all religions are different ways of expressing the same truths and that their validity for any particular individual depends on his nature and needs (Farrar & Farrar, 1984, p. 154).

Some of the artefacts in the Witchcraft Museum in Boscastle in Cornwall may offer some challenge to the view that ‘wyse women’ were essentially benign, as they have been interpreted to represent some perhaps less positive aspects of older Witchcraft practice. The website (Museum Of Witchcraft, 2013) of the museum holds the following warning to potential visitors: ‘People with Children [sic] of a sensitive disposition are warned that some of the exhibits are controversial.’ For instance a small coffin contains three beeswax poppets that can hold spells or nail parings before being sealed in. The original owner of the museum, Cecil Williamson, himself a practising Witch, described this exhibit as: ‘straight up and down ill wishing black magic’.

### ***Female sacrality***

Many of the stories that Witches find significant include goddess names, such as Hecate, Morrigan, or Isis. These ancient goddesses represent female empowerment, with powers of wisdom, powers of healing, control over battle, and sovereignty over the land – powers that traditionally in the West have perhaps been seen as male. Witchcraft therefore does attract a large number of feminist supporters – both women and men. Paganism as a whole is a space where women, as well as men, can be sacred; where they can take on priestly or priestess status. In the Christian denominations that many

received in their childhoods some Pagans may have perceived that the only potential space for women to be sacred was as nuns or deaconesses – both positions considered as secondary to the male priest status. A number of women interviewed said that their childhood intention had been to become nuns upon reaching adulthood. From my research it seems apparent that a large proportion of first-generation Pagans are genuinely spiritual seekers, by which I mean they remained ‘enchanted’ even though the framework, or story, of their original religion did not sit comfortably with them, and certainly for women practitioners who wish to live within a position of sacrality Witchcraft is an obvious place to be able to do so. Priestesses and Priests remain equal although in Wicca the coven leader is the High Priestess rather than the High Priest.

Ceremonial robes can be worn by women within Witchcraft to show their status as priestess. This is a relatively new position for women in Britain, where the Anglican church is still in a fraught position with much argument about the priestly status of women, despite the ordination of women, including one to the status of bishop. At Witchfest 2011 Barbara Meiklejohn-Free, describing herself as a Highland seeress, and a practitioner of Pictish Witchcraft, addressed an audience, clad in a long green velvet dress and cloak with gold inner sleeves. She carried a long white staff and wore a white rose headdress. She was an imposing and dramatic figure whose clothing implied an intention to advertise herself as a leader: a powerful, sacred woman.

This clothing, while having a hint of the medieval period in terms of length, colour and material, was not historical in relation to Witchcraft but perhaps an example of an imagined costume, and representative of a desire to dress the past with an image of power in order to give authority in the present.

As there are few memorable stories of powerful sacred women in recent British history, Witches draw their significant older stories from tales of goddesses that may come from a variety of ancient pantheons who exhibit such powerfulness.

## **Priesthood**

There is no professional priesthood within any of the Pagan traditions in Britain. Each practitioner holds a direct relationship with divinity. As SY, a Heathen, said:

In ancient times the person who usually performed religious rites – outside of special occasions – would have been the leader of the household, not a professional priesthood or public figure. ‘Dad’, of course, may be perfectly qualified to offer individual advice as well as performing family rituals.

This specific reference to the father being the traditional leader of the family and therefore of the family rituals highlights the situation that Heathenry, based in old Anglo-Saxon and Nordic stories and history, still has an emphasis on male primacy, although that appears to be changing. More attention is now being paid to the goddesses of the Northern pantheon such as Freyja and Frigg. Women practitioners are taking more of a lead, and the ancient role of the *volva*, the seeress/Witch and practitioner of *seidr* (traditionally regarded as a kind of women’s magic) is being considered more seriously. From the little that is known of the traditional role of the *volva* in Scandinavia it seems that it may have been to travel between farmsteads to prophesise for them. Women practitioners are now exhibiting an interest in the work of Diana Paxson (2006), a writer and contemporary practitioner of *seidr* in the USA. *Seidr* is considered to have involved practices that might be described as similar to shamanic practice, with the *volva* involved in trance work and magical journeying to retrieve the necessary information (also see Blain, 2002).

## **The Glastonbury Goddess**

The use of goddess myths to establish ways of being divine for women is sharply brought into focus through the network of Priestesses and Priests of Avalon that has developed based around the figure of the Glastonbury Goddess. Based on the research and writings of Kathy Jones (2001), the Lady of Avalon is revered and celebrated by practitioners who follow three levels of training. The first year leads to the initiate becoming a Sister or Brother of Avalon, the second year to becoming a Priestess/Priest of the Goddess and the third to a Priestess/Priest of Avalon. Attendants who look after the temple are called Melissas, regardless of gender, and they tend the nine Morgens – female figures that reside in the temple in Glastonbury, that represent the spirit of the goddess at different times of the year.

Jones has based her writings on myths of ancient British goddesses and established a temple at Glastonbury dedicated to the goddess of the land surrounding that place. There are practitioners of both genders but the focus of the religion is on women. Annually a Glastonbury Goddess conference is held and the speakers are virtually all women. The 17th conference was held 31st July-5th August 2012 and there was one male speaker on the programme. Men are welcome however. RO, a Brother of Avalon, told me:

The development of a contemporary Goddess myth is, I think, one of the most difficult and challenging tasks my group faces. When you put yourself in the shoes of a goddess you have to be reverent and humble, welcome them in and... be open to new meanings truths and insights.

CH, a Druid, spoke of the way that she creates her music and poetry, inviting different goddesses to work with her, and experiencing their different natures. Branwen (a figure from the Mabinogion, not usually described as a goddess) she described as



golden and described her feelings of regret at having to leave her behind when she continued her work with other goddesses. Morrigan (the Irish battle goddess) she regarded as the most complex.

Working with goddess myths in order to understand and shape their own feelings of empowerment, sacrality, and womanhood is important to many women Pagans, regardless of pathway.

### **Myth in the process of building a community**

Paganism may be described as an individual religious interpretation clustered around certain key themes, and the freedom to be individual in that interpretation may be viewed as one of those themes. However, many Pagans wish to meet with, converse with, construct ritual with, and socialise with other like-minded practitioners. This may be geographically based, where groups form that regularly meet or, it may be through the internet via online forums, Facebook groups, or website contacts. The groups may be specifically formed around one particular pathway such as a Wiccan coven, which has a specific membership, or they may be more loosely aligned, with titles that indicate that all pathways are welcome, such as Derbyshire Pagans. Online groups may be more open, or they may require potential members to make contact with an explanation of who they are and what their values are within Paganism before being allowed to join.

Community formation is taking place. Old-style communities were geographically based, and developed due to shared histories, shared environments, and local knowledge. Many of those communities have dissipated with the greater social mobility induced by the changing social conditions of the twentieth century. Pagan practitioners, relatively small in numbers, are often geographically dislocated and therefore have to have the will and the desire to join together and they need a shared

history in order to do so. In constructing this shared history they look to the older myth stories – Norse and Celtic – that represent lines of connection threading through British history. These stories and the characters from them have often have become embedded into folklore and more recently fantasy literature, as shown in the early works of Garner. Certain key stories have taken centre stage in establishing the imagined history of Britain, those of the Matter of Britain. These are the tales of Arthur and his knights. The tales of the Matter of Britain are set in the idealised land of Logres, a Britain of chivalry and noble deeds, where the magical landscape lies alongside and entwined with that of the perceived one. Ross Nichols, when describing the type of myth he saw would enable the revivification of the relationship with the countryside wrote:

The variant used must be locally acceptable, maybe indigenous. In England it would be unnatural to attempt to present Greek mythology; Demeter and Persephone, however satisfying as South European incarnations of earth and summer will remain exotic by Thames-side. The British Isles have their own rich and appropriate myths (2002b, p.205).

‘If we called ourselves Celtic-Scandinavian as a race it would be more correct than Anglo-Saxon’ (2002b, p. 245). With this comment Nichols is perhaps displaying some of the underlying difference between Druidry and Heathenry, in that practitioners of Heathenry take the idea of being historically Anglo-Saxon seriously and register discomfort at being placed alongside images of imagined Celtic Paganism. Such discomfort with Norse mythology is less obvious among Druids but they tend simply not to reference it.

The fact that Druidism was driven west by the Romans does not alter the equally definite fact that the Druidic system, together with the mythology we call Celtic, remain as being of England primarily; they form a native heritage to be claimed back (Nichols 2002b, p. 2).

Both Heathenry and Druidry are in the process of establishing some kind of a present-day community for Britain that is rooted in a conception of a historical and native tradition, and both pathways use mythological stories as a primary way of doing so. The intermingling of cultural indigenous identities that is occurring within Paganism through the use of these older mythologies is representative of the mixtures of ancient histories that the invasions of successive peoples over time in Britain have created. Barczewski, in her discussion of the ways that myths of King Arthur and Robin Hood were developed and presented as part of the formation of national identity in nineteenth-century Britain, makes the point:

Although, as we have seen, historical probability made it difficult for King Arthur to be labelled a Saxon hero in so blatant a fashion, twentieth-century authors continued to deny his Celtic origins and refer to him as the 'King of England' (2000, p.233).

This in spite of the situation that it is likely that the real Arthur was most probably, what she describes as, a sixth-century Celt who fought the invasion of the Saxons. The recent BBC 1 television series *Merlin* (broadcast 2008-2012) included Druids as characters, who are usually imagined as Celtic. This national myth has been reconfigured to mirror the confusions in historical British identities and is therefore available to be utilised as an expression of indigenous identity by Druids and Heathens.

### **Gods as metaphors**

As argued earlier, some Pagans express the notion that their use of gods and goddesses is not so much a belief in their actual existence, as a usage of them and what they represent as metaphors.

Believing it's the absolute truth means that you've actually got to believe in the entities. It's a bit like the Christian faith, especially in a rational world, you have to put aside your rationalism. There's all these mystical

beings out there that we can't have any physical evidence for – but my rather down to earth elderly uncle refers to it as a bit spooky-wooky. Whereas the use of metaphor to focus your mind and understand things is much more readily accepted I suppose (RI).

This kind of response does not indicate a widespread lack of belief in that which might be called supernatural force. Many Pagans, while describing their use of mythological figures similarly to RI as focuses for understanding, express a belief in the existence of one spiritual force that connects together everything in the universe.

### **The shamanic tradition of Britain**

The phrase 'the shamanic tradition of Britain' came from one respondent, KB, who was trying to explain her practice within Witchcraft and described her coven as practising the shamanic tradition of Britain. The grouping of these words together is of interest in that it ties together a type of religious practice, a sense of historical connection and the land of Britain in a way that is presented as homogenised and accepted. Within the Pagan communities the use of the word shamanism is an accepted one. Current academic considerations as to it being a term that is specific to a particular set of practitioners in Siberia (Hutton, 2001) are absent for practitioners, and the term relates to a communal understanding that journeying and ecstatic practice are generic elements of enchanted religions world-wide and through time. In this Pagans are more akin to the conception of Eliade (2004) in seeing shamanism as being a global religious ecstatic experience. Characters in Alan Garner's novels often seem to demonstrate an ecstatic experience that is similar to that described by Eliade, acting as connections to and protectors of their land and communities. Jack the jagger in *Thursbitch* and Murrangurk in *Strandloper* being notable examples. Garner told me, 'My definition of the word 'shaman' follows that of Mircea Eliade.' Ecstatic connection to the place of origination

is a strong theme for both Garner, in his novels, and in the practice and experience of Pagans, and forms part of the enchanted worldview that is expressed in both the literature and the religion.

In KB's phrase above she is indicating her belief that ecstatic religious experience has always been part of what it means to be British.

Znemenski argues that neo-shamanic practices broadly form part of the tradition of Western esotericism and sit within the realms of contemporary Paganism and New Age-ism. He acknowledges that some practitioners are 'eclectics who are oriented toward universal spirituality and who borrow freely from the East and the West' (2007, p. 369), but that others have moved away from the Eliadean view of shamanism and are attempting to tie themselves within their own indigenous traditions. KB seems to suggest that her understanding of her practice is that it is bound to Britain itself and is, in the sense of her perception of Britishness as being indigenous, therefore tied into a particular locality. She exhibits an understanding of the shamanic tradition of Britain that is tied to locality, but still considers the actual practices that she undertakes as being part of a more universal set of characteristics. In this way she is representative of both strands of Znemenski's thought and in this is not dissimilar to other Pagans who perceive their practice to form part of a relationship with one particular place and all the persons in it, but at the same time consider their practice to be representative of a wider one that is in operation throughout the world.

Practitioners of Northern witchcraft are developing a form of *seidr* that is based in interpretations of the role of the *volva* in ancient Scandinavia. Although information is scant as to the exact role of the *volva*, as previously stated, one of those roles appears to have been making prophesy for farmsteads using techniques that are described as shamanic by contemporary practitioners, as the *volva* would sit on platforms in public

halls and go into a form of ecstatic trance in order to make the prophesy, assisted by choirs singing to attract spirits.

Some Pagans undertake training in shamanic practice, learning techniques of journeying to meet their spirit guides, undertaking journeys around their own bodies to enable greater understanding of who and what they are and what different organs can teach them, retrieving their knowledge of their own soul name.

Practices that might generically be described as shamanic are utilised by practitioners of each of the main pathways within Paganism, and frequently are seen as ways to connect the practitioner with the creatures, entities and spirits of the landscape within which they are operating. Drawing upon KB's description above there is an underlying understanding among Pagans that they have the means to make direct connection with the landscape to which they belong. This is a shared element of what might be described as the personal myth of the Pagan.

### **The personal myth of the Pagan**

Rees (1996) discusses the importance of what he calls 'substantive' myth to the Pagan communities. By this he means the actual narrative structures as instanced by specific bodies of myth across the world, including what he describes as 'allied texts such as fairy lore, legend or saga' (1996, p. 16). In this chapter I have discussed the community-forming aspects of the use of such myth, and the way that its use assists in the creation of a sense of identity. Rees also outlines the importance, as he sees it, of individual personal myth in the creation and maintenance of the religion:

I therefore urge the necessity for teasing out the myths which inform the pagan and magical sub-cultures – those personal myths which propel seekers towards paganism once attracted – as well as investigating those myths which maintain people in their memberships, once inside as it were (1996, p. 29).

Much of the discussion above has outlined myths that create and sustain the Pagan communities, without being part of substantive myth – mythic conceptions of British shamans, Witchcraft as the Old Religion, and the imagining of an ancestry stemming from ‘the Celts’ as some specific instances.

Some of the core personal myths that are expressed in varying ways in all of the main Pagan pathways are these: I am a Pagan and that means that I am the descendant of people who have lived here a long time. I have a personal connection with this land. I have a connection with this particular place. I can engage the sentience in all that is around me. I am responsible for this land and all that it contains. I can work magic through my connections into the world. I have a priestly/essly function to look after my land.

The above elements appear to be a part of the self-understanding of those that identify as Pagan, regardless of the path within Paganism that they choose to follow. As one respondent explained to me, myth is not true in a literal way but the stories may have a spiritual or energetic truth around which life stories can be constructed. The stories used may be different but they develop a shared set of understandings, and by doing so they make a major contribution to the construction of community within Paganism. This is important within a religion that has no central unifying text, no set rules for behaviour or belief, and no definitive framework of the kind that the traditional religions have. Paganism is a religion that attracts and is constructed by people that value individualism and personal responsibility for the religious choices that they make, but many of its practitioners want to be able to share, to meet, and to belong. Shared stories – whether of older pantheons, tales of the land, stories of female empowerment, or magical tales encourage binding and help to create the communities within the religion, as well as coherence for individual Life Stories. Myth ties together history,

ancestry, geography, culture and identity. It promotes continuity with the past, and develops community in the present. It also promotes a sense of community through time.

All of the communities look backwards for their verification, to a time in Britain of pre-Christianity, pre-industrialisation, pre-colonial activity, and include as part of their communities those imagined ancestors and their perceived values that pre-date all of this history and cultural development. British Pagan communities are building a shared identity based on shared beliefs in the value of nature, magical practice, and a love of place, but for a country with a history of influx of different peoples a mixture of mythologies is utilised in order to reconnect with the past.

Pagans ‘find’ their religion because in some way it fits in and connects together meanings that pre-existed for them. The work of a writer like Garner, utilising mythic tales and poetic prose, to create an enchanted world within a specific place in this one is significant within the debate of how this happens. Stories of enchanted worlds are very important to practitioners of Paganism.

## **Conclusions**

Myth is an element in the creation for Pagans of an enchanted worldview. Metaphor allows an engagement for them with perceived deeper truths from older days. Myth sits at the core of all of the elements that are valued within Paganism – continuation and community, connection with ancestors, engagement with the island of Britain, engagement with ancient history, connections across time in a particular landscape, other-than-human persons from the secondary world – the Otherworld, through time and over time, preservation for the future, combating loss and making recovery.



These are the tales of our heritage, the bardic tales passed on undercover.  
These stories, informed my questing heart and mind just as much as the  
textbooks I needed to enter into the strata of organised society (TO).

The key word in this statement is *heritage*. Underlying all of the connecting  
themes of Paganism is the desire to establish a sense of connecting indigenous identity.

## Chapter Eight: Magic and enchantment

One consistent conclusion from all this research is that popular belief in supernatural cause and effect is higher than one would have thought possible in predominantly rationalist cultures and that it has been consistently underestimated (Bennett, 1999, p. 11).

At the present day, Britannia is still fascinated by magic, and performs its rites with much ceremony (Pliny *Historia Naturalis* xxx 13) (opening quotation in Carr-Gomm and Heygate (2007)).

Every country has its magic: in its wild places, in its history, and in the traditions of its healers and mystics. The lands that border England have a special magic – Wales and Scotland are brimming with tales of wizards and seers – but this book focuses on the country that has grown, by design or quirk of fate, into the world's richest storehouse of magical lore: England (Carr-Gomm and Heygate, 2007, p. 3).

It is useful to consider the importance of magic within the communities and how it contributes to the enchanted worldview. Within the wider world the words *magic* and *enchantment* are often used interchangeably to indicate both a power that is supernatural and inexplicable, and a sense of *the* magical. Within this thesis these words are used more precisely in order to clarify the differences between the two when in discussion about the Pagan community. In this chapter I examine different aspects of magic and how it is variously utilised within different Pagan pathways, and will consider the nature of this enchanted worldview, particularly in response to the use of the word disenchantment in the Weberian sense.

### **Really realness and magical consciousness**

In her study of ritual magic in contemporary England, Luhrmann (1989) states her intention to try to provide an answer as to why people find the idea of magic to be

persuasive. Her research was conducted within ritual magic groups in London, where she found that:

Modern magic is a mixture of many different activities and ideas...

Practitioners think of themselves as, or inspired by, the witches, wizards, druids, kabbalists, shamans, of mostly European lore (1989, p. 6).

The influence of story in the development of magical practitioners is acknowledged by her, although she considers the types of literature that magical practitioners read reveal an:

uncritical absorption in the characters. The educated reader asks whether Joyce has successfully portrayed human mundanity. The child simply enjoys Narnia (1989, p. 87).

The books she cites as having found to be popular within her subject group were similar to the ones that were revealed as such during my own research across Pagan pathways more widely. These were Tolkien's (1978) *The Lord of the Rings*, Le Guin's (1971) *Earthsea* novels, Zimmer Bradley's (1982) *The Mists of Avalon*, Dion Fortune's (2003) *The Sea Priestess* and Dennis Wheatley's (2013) *The Devil Rides Out* (although Wheatley was not mentioned at all by my Druid or Heathen respondents and only twice by Witches. This may be because Wheatley was more occulturally significant in the mid-1980's, and is perhaps an example of how occultural content shifts continually).

Luhrmann in her analysis makes, as her start point, a rationalist assumption that magic as any kind of an ontological reality, does not exist. This assumption is necessary in terms of that which she is trying to analyse:

The process that allows people to accept outlandish, apparently irrational beliefs... the question is how people come to make certain assertions and to act as if they were true... modern magicians are interesting because they are a flamboyant example of a very common process: that when people get involved in an activity they develop ways of interpreting which make that

activity meaningful even though it may seem foolish to the uninvolved (1989, p. 7).

Luhrmann's stated assumption that magic does not have a genuine existence and cannot therefore have validity, leads her to the conclusion that apparently rational people only become magical practitioners if they undergo a process of transformation that she calls 'interpretive drift,' which she defines as a 'slow shift in the manner of interpreting events, making sense of experiences, and responding to the world' (1989, p. 12). For her, the most striking feature of this is how *ad hoc* and seemingly unmotivated this transformation becomes. From my mixed position of holding both emic and etic status within this research, as magical practitioner and scholar, I have considered that this initial theoretical approach by Luhrmann may have constrained her understanding of some of the experiences that she witnessed. As an example, she describes how one practitioner decided to leave a particular magical group as she was over committed to too many groups. Luhrmann describes that this person utilised a pendulum in order to make her decision as to which group to leave. In a footnote to this description Luhrmann makes the comment that this practitioner, 'seemed willing to let the decision about her participation be taken by apparently arbitrary means' (1989, p. 27). Luhrmann seems surprised by this, and her use of the words 'apparently arbitrary' reveals a lack of understanding that for a magical practitioner this would not necessarily be an arbitrary act. She does not go on to make this further point, to try to give an explanation of the activity as it would be understood from within the practitioner's point of view, possibly due to the initial constraint she set upon her analysis by making the assumption that magic is ontologically non-existent.

In my analysis of data relating to magical practice and understanding I have followed a framework of thought that is more aligned with Orsi's (2012) call for

academic considerations of 'everyday' religion to give credence to the 'really realness' of practitioner experience, in order to make explanation of it. I make no claim as to the validity or otherwise of an ontological reality of magic, but I have confined myself to considerations of what is meaningful for practitioners in order to try to analyse their activities more closely. Alongside this, I have been mindful of Greenwood's argument that anthropology as a discipline needs to transform its understanding of magic and recognise it as being a legitimate form of knowledge. Her approach focuses on what she describes as *magical consciousness*, a term she describes as 'a mythopoetic, expanded aspect of awareness that can potentially be experienced by everyone' (2009, p. 4). She argues that a more scientific framework is required that can overcome the theoretical tendency to devalue magical experience and that can recognise magical knowledge as a valuable aspect of human consciousness.

Hanegraaff makes a similar point:

It seems to me that the real question is another one: 'how is one to understand that intellectuals can so often be blind to the pervasive role of non-rational factors in human behaviour and belief, including their own?' (2003, p. 372).

In terms of practitioners like RI, and other Pagans, such an approach takes cognisance of their holistic understanding and experience of the world. In my analysis therefore I have concentrated on the reality of the experience for the magical practitioner in order to try to understand and interpret the meaningfulness of that experience.

### **Re-enchantment and enchantment**

Partridge (2004) has argued that there is currently a proliferation of interests in disparate arenas such as astrology, tarot, psychic mediums, and vampire novels in the West which

represent a shift in spiritual interests that he considers to reveal re-enchantment taking place within society. He describes this with the term 'occulture'. I argue that Paganism exemplifies a continuity of enchantment as its practitioners indicate that this religion is a framework for expression of their belief in other dimensions and that that belief very often pre-existed their practice of the religion, encouraged by other arenas of experience which might be described as occultural and which I have exampled in the chapters on Fantasy and Myth. Paganism represents one pocket of enchantment within a culture that contains many pockets of disenchantment, and enchantment. Disenchantment has not occurred as an absolute, as Orsi points out:

Although we know enough today not to say that the modern world is 'disenchanted,' in Max Weber's famous word (there are plenty of enchantments among both modern secularists and religionists) (2012, p. 155).

An enchanted worldview exists within Paganism and within other arenas of expression of popular culture, examples of which are the works of Alan Garner, substantive myth stories and certain types of fantasy literature. Reading of fantasy, especially where it is rooted in and roots the reader to a particular landscape, is a key point in the creation and maintenance of this enchanted worldview. Hanegraaff has contended that magic has survived the disenchantment of the West, in which he defines disenchantment as a social pressure that is exerted upon humans:

to deny the spontaneous tendency of participation, by accepting the claims of a culturally established ideology according to which instrumental causality amounts to a worldview capable in principle of rationally explaining all aspects of rationality (2003, p. 377).

He contends that disenchantment is based on the societally induced internalisation of the ideology of instrumental causality as the dominant narrative of western society, and that this ideology induces tension in relation to participation.

Having borrowed the term *participation* from the philosopher Levy-Bruhl, he defines his usage of it as:

a spontaneous tendency of the human mind. As such, it is an immediate and irreducible datum of human experience, which neither permits nor requires further experience but has to be simply noted as a fact (2003, p. 374).

Levy-Bruhl represented participation as an affective and non-rational category of human experience, which is based on feeling instead of reflection. It therefore cannot be understood rationally because it 'is not a thing of the intellect' (1949, pp. 5-6).

Hanegraaff argues that participation and instrumental causality coexisted prior to the ideology of instrumental causality becoming the dominant western one, and that, as magic stems from participation, it has survived as an area of resistance practised by those who choose not to accept this dominant ideology. I argue, in support of Hanegraaff, that Pagans are representative of those who have not accepted instrumental causality as dominant, but are attempting to recalibrate the position between that ideology and one of participation, and that this re-balancing approach is an integral one in contemporary Britain.

### **Uses of magic within the various communities**

For some Pagans the concept of magic is simply another way of expressing the inexplicable. It is a kind of story in itself, but for others it is a genuine force that can be practically applied. Some Pagans believe in elves, dwarfs, faeries and other magical creatures that those outside the religion might consider to be elements of story alone (with an implication that they are in some way not true). Many Pagans believe in the reality of Otherworld, a realm that sits somewhere close to this one, that can be accessed via gateways, boundaries, or 'veils' between the worlds, particularly at certain times of

the year when those veils become less distinct and easier to cross. There is a difference in the way that magic is viewed as opposed to the magical: the first is a practical application, while the second relies on an imaginative response. For Pagans magic is something that they do. Pagan use of the word magical indicates a belief in other dimensions, and the persons that dwell within them, that are not perceived through the accepted senses, while my use of the word enchantment in relation to Paganism indicates the whole worldview of that religion, which includes the intense feelings aroused by connection to place, the practice of magic, acknowledgement of the supernatural as well as the natural and the wonder that is aroused by belonging to something that is larger and more meaningful than the individual self.

### ***Magic and Witchcraft***

For those that self-identify as Witches the use of magic is an act of empowerment. It is a practical act that enables them consciously to direct their will through the network of energies that they perceive to connect all things, both in the outer world and in the Otherworld (which elsewhere I have described as the primary and secondary realms). While the dominant rational ideological paradigm in the West may suggest such beliefs to be irrational, Witches are able to intellectually conceive of the act of magical practice in a way that reconciles it with other more scientifically based understanding.

Definitions of magic can be conjuring tricks, or miracles defying the laws of nature which Witches can't do. Or natural magic – herbs or psychological effects. One definition of magic for me was this thought process about effect through the multiverse. Another one was reconciling my acceptance of the elements/god/goddess with my scientific beliefs. I guess the only reason I came to that was by going into it prepared to accept mutually contradictory beliefs in my mind. Gradually I was able to form some sort of synthesis of everything. Those off-the-wall beliefs seem to be



shared by a lot of other Pagans. I only found that out after I'd thought through them for myself (RI).

Here, RI openly states that he has a scientific viewpoint. He works in an academic role. He acknowledges that for him the *laws of nature* cannot be broken by Witches and he uses terminology like *multiverse*. He is, however, still able to synthesise this viewpoint with a magical one. He demonstrates a personal understanding that both a scientific viewpoint and a magical one are valid and in this is similar to many other Pagans.

### ***Power of the mind***

JE works within the field of psychology and uses terminology such as *change consciousness* to explain her understanding of the use of magic.

I would locate myself within that European sense of Witchcraft – it makes most sense to me because this is the climate in which I live, and in particular in the Reclaiming Tradition which combines action in the world with personal change alongside that spirituality. A three legged stool if you like. Each leg's important. One's the Craft – how to work with energy and foster that deep sense of connection. Observing the cycles of the seasons. Coming together to work magic, change consciousness – but part of that is to be able to act in the world. I'm quite disturbed by people who don't seem to have an environmental commitment. The other side is personal change to be empowered to change what our culture has laid on us – so we can act for the highest – the best (JE).

CW is a retired teacher. She uses the phrase *power of the mind* and reiterates the word *power* in giving her explanation of magic.

I think the power of the mind to heal ourselves either alone or collectively is ignored by society. It links in with nuns thinking they can help people by being locked away somewhere. I think its all mind power. I think magic is putting the positive forward. I venerate the full moon and its powers and peoples powers and the power of thought (CW).

In an article in *Witchcraft & Wicca* magazine, Fred Lamond describes what Witchcraft does:

Witchcraft combines the skills of divination, herbal and spiritual healing, and affecting the fate of people as well as the weather by the power of the focused mind (2003, p. 12).

It is notable that each of these statements reveals an understanding of magic that is a combination of the will and a feeling of power. Witchcraft is a pathway within Paganism that seems to attract practitioners that wish to exercise this kind of practical version of the religion. They are doers. Their magical activities include spell-casting, and creating the cone of power – a group ritual, performed in the sacred space of the consecrated circle, in which a vast cone of energy is summoned up by the group and then directed towards the object or person that the group has decided to act upon.

Witchcraft's emphasis is on working collectively to undertake change that is intended to be positive. It concentrates on taking action and making connection holistically throughout the primary and secondary realms in order to effect such change.

### ***Magic and Heathenry***

Heathenry is, by contrast with Witchcraft, a religion that currently tends to attract more men, although that position may be changing. As stated previously there are women practitioners that are beginning to develop an interest in and practice of *seidr*, utilising the ideas of Diane Paxson in the United States who is a novelist, writer and practitioner. There is only slim historical evidence available in the Prose Edda (Sturluson, 2005) and Poetic Edda (Larrington, 2008) and Icelandic Sagas (Thorsson and Scudder, 2001) as to how *seidr* may actually historically have been practised, and some interpretation is taking place. In a lecture delivered at Witchfest 2011, an academic and practitioner, made the point that in Northern Europe there has been a great deal of cross-pollination

of gods and mythologies from many peoples. She cited the Sami, Finns, Greeks, Romans, Irish, and Celtic. She followed this by saying:

This is what makes Britain strong. This is what makes Druidry and Wicca strong – it comes from the borrowing through the generations that has built up this great magical tradition (KG).

In saying this she indicates again the importance of the concept of *Britain* as the place of cohesion for the main Pagan pathways.

Pete Jennings is a gothi, a priest within Heathenry and a practitioner of galdr, also developed from historical sources, and was a more ritualised, song form of magic often practised by men. He said: 'The non Heathen book *Real Magic* by Issac Bonewits [1989] from the USA has been a major influence on my magical practice.' (Bonewits was an American Druid who drew together magical beliefs from a variety of sources and brought them together in a set of laws of magic within this book). Although Heathenry is concerned with developing a religion that re-enacts and develops the perceived historical activities of Northern forbears, it, as with the other Pagan pathways, is also an individual practice as well as a community one, and while its emphasis is not on the practice of magic, some practitioners have a magical consciousness. Holding a worldview that is enchanted is core for some Heathens, whether or not they are actual practitioners of magic. DP described the moment when he realised that he was a Heathen. He experienced a visit from the Scandinavian god Thor, which was an intense emotional experience for him. He understood that the god was Thor because he had flaming eyes. DP also acknowledges that his recognition of Heathenry stems as well from the fact that he was born in, and lives in, an area that has strong Viking ancestry. In this way DP acknowledges a belief in the magical – that which is experienced other than through the accepted senses, but he also acknowledges that his understanding of

himself as a Heathen is based upon his imagined cultural links to the historical peoples that lived in that area. DP's conception of himself is based upon a primary world belief of historical connection coupled with a knowing of a particular god. His perception and understanding of Thor is based on feeling rather than reflection. His experience is an example of the recalibration of a rationalist and a participative approach in his worldview.

### ***Magic and Druidry***

Although it would be inaccurate to say that no Druid gets involved in the actual practice of magic, and indeed this has been acknowledged by Philip Carr-Gomm in his book *Druidcraft* (2002c) in which he discusses the similarities between Druidry and Witchcraft, for many Druids ritual spell-casting is not the focus for how they get involved with magic. Carr-Gomm told me:

My daily practice is a walk up on the downs for an hour in the morning. I don't do complicated ceremonies. I have an altar upstairs. I don't worship... a lot of my practice is just clearing, just emptying.

DA, when addressing an assembly of Druids, said:

Before I came to OBOD I was in a ceremonial magic group. Hermetic magic for four years and then the group stopped. This is where I became aware of magic – taught that belief in the power of magic was almost everything. I use that power of belief.

### ***Awen***

For Druids there is a greater emphasis on the power of the creative impulse. Inspiration is understood as the creative principle that flows through all things. Druids refer to this as 'Awen'. It is present in many of the activities that Druids undertake, from writing poetry, to connecting with the forces of life as they exist in other persons – trees, stones, and animals. Druids consciously summon it, particularly during group rituals, when

they begin by chanting the word *Awen* three times. (The number three is considered to be a powerful number containing magical strength). The exercise of the power of *Awen* is seen as a positive force.

In a talk given to an assembly of Druids BP, a Bard and Druid, said:

I believe inspiration is natural, free, inexhaustible and immanent. Always present – a natural condition, a natural expression of the human condition, proud and powerful. We get cut off from it so then we have to do all these things to try to get back to it. It's immanent. We co-conspire with parents, friends etc to divert it – 'mind-forged manacles' – a self-limiting programme. Inspiration is scary as fuck. Inspiration is dangerous. Fear holds us back. We constantly edit our experience. Inspiration is available constantly – we just need to know how to tune in.

How is inspiration different from magic in the practical way that Witches define it? Again BP on inspiration:

It's a mantic moment – a moment of vision – it happens in the here and now. Inspiration for me is not just about an outer act of creativity that bears fruit. I might play a flute in birch trees spontaneously and then go home and forget. It's magic, it's transformation, it's new ways of being.

BP's definition reveals an understanding of the power of the use of inspiration that is not about doing, but rather is about being. Inspiration is about the power of self-transformation rather more than an act of will imposed upon other. This perhaps lies at the heart of the difference between Pagans that self-identify as Druids rather than as Witches. The focus of their worldview is more upon the inner meditative world rather than the outer more practical.

When DA asked this same audience of Druids what provoked the feeling of inspiration in them, the answers that they shouted out were varied: colours, trees, sitting by the sea quietly, catching babies as a midwife, dreams, stars.

None of these responses demonstrated a desire to effect change through the exercise of the will. This is not to say that no Druidic practice is concerned with the practical use of magic. Practitioners use herbs for healing, and burn different coloured candles to focus the perceived effects of different seasons. As KG said (see above) the magical tradition within Britain has borrowed and shared over generations, but there is a significant difference in emphasis between *doing* magic and *being* within a magical world.

In this way it starts to make visible some of the differences in terms of the enchanted world-view of various practitioners of different pathways.

### **An enchanted worldview**

Enchantment produces a Secondary World into which both designer and spectator can enter, to the satisfaction of their senses while they are inside; but in its purity it is artistic in desire and purpose. Magic produces, or pretends to produce, an alteration in the Primary World. It does not matter by whom it is said to be practical, fay or mortal, it remains distinct from the other two; it is not an art but a technique; its desire is power in this world, domination of things and wills (Tolkien, 2001, p. 53).

The evocative term *enchantment* neatly captures the sense of the magical numinous, and a state of mind seemingly at odds with the modern outlook (Owen, 2004, p. 12).

These two quotations can be used to illustrate the difference between the uses of the terms magic and enchantment when looking at Paganism, although Tolkien's description of magic as being a *domination* of things and wills is stated more strongly here than it would be by Pagans. Although they exhibit the desire to effect change through the exercise of the will, the communities reject any practices that are apparently designed to dominate. In wider society the terms *black* and *white* Witch are often used to designate practitioners that are deemed to use magic either maliciously or for positive

ends. These terms are not accepted among Pagans as Witchcraft, as a religion, is designated to be for positive purposes or at its least, harmless. Any person that desires to cause negative effects through the exercise of the will is deemed not to be a Witch, and is not recognised as such within the communities.

Owen's definition of enchantment (above) can also be applied in designating some of the elements of the Pagan worldview, with the emphasis on a magical perception and a state of mind that is *seemingly* at odds with a modern outlook.

If, as I argue, Paganism represents a grouping together of people who express a belief in and an undertaking of activities that indicate an enchanted worldview, then it is useful to refine my usage of the term enchantment in this context. For Pagans enchantment seems to be a paradigm that encompasses a number of elements, each of which is combined to different extents within and by an individual, but which creates a worldview that is recognisable to all. These elements are often tenuous and underlying and difficult even for practitioners themselves to explain, and differing terminologies used can contribute to that difficulty of expression. The Druidic concept of inspiration can be considered as part of this paradigm and DA explained his struggle with this: 'For me inspiration is a feeling and so hard to explain. That's the feeling I get when writing songs.' Other descriptions Pagans give of the elements of enchantment include imagination, entry into other dimensions, story and pleasure. BP quoted William Blake when he tried to explain what a Pagan was: 'I know that this world is one of imagination.' Journeying, for some practitioners is a genuine experience of travelling in other dimensions, while for others it is a meditative exercise. DA posed this question to himself and to other Druids at the same time:

How much of it was real and how much in my imagination – how many think it's imagination and how many think I'm journeying in a different place?

Neither he nor others were able to find a resolution to this question.

### *Story and enchantment*

Story, in the forms of older myths and contemporary fantasy, offers a vital contribution to the enchanted worldview of Paganism. Leading Witchcraft practitioners Janet and Stewart Farrar wrote:

Myths (and their folklore descendants, fairy-tales) owe their durability, and their powerful effects on men's minds, to the fact that they dramatize psychic truths which the unconscious mind recognizes at once, even while the conscious mind may think that it is merely being entertained by a well-told story. Both levels of the mind are satisfied at the same time, and the knowledge of this fact filters through to the conscious mind in the form of a strangely enhanced sense of pleasure (1984, p. 146).

What is interesting to note about this statement is the combination of intellectual and scientific explanation concerning the potential effects of a myth story, but also the final comment about the effect of that story as being an enhanced sense of pleasure.

Curry has discussed the natures of magic and enchantment, stating:

Enchantment must indispensably include an experience of wonder as a reality that, so far as the person(s) involved are concerned, could otherwise or hitherto only ever have been imagined. (Note that it need not have actually been imagined – i.e. by the conceiving mind) (1999, p. 3).

For the Pagan community then I posit that enchantment is a view of the world that stimulates and maintains a sense of wonder in its practitioners, and that there are a shared set of themes that are able to stimulate this sense. The actual application of magic as a technique is one of these themes but its overall contribution to enchantment is varying dependent upon the individual practitioner. Other major elements of



enchantment within the communities are the creative impulse, a desire to make connection with ancestors, a love of myth and fantasy and, as I argue throughout this thesis, the desire to create or recreate an identity of belonging through the development of a religion that is imagined as being of the particular place of Albion. Specific places within Britain may stimulate a sense of ownership or belonging within individuals, but some places in particular are held to be of special importance by the majority of practitioners. These include Stonehenge and the Avebury Circle. Other locations are of specific importance to particular pathways, such as Thor's cave in Staffordshire, which is meaningful to some Heathens. Individuals cite particular places that are meaningful for them in locations as far apart as Cornwall, the Derbyshire Peaks, the Welsh hills or the isles of Scotland.

The practice of magic may be viewed as an element of a modernist approach to living, in the context of it being worked through formal spell-casting or defined ritual. Structured activity is deemed of importance in achieving the desired result. The combination of the varying elements described above, which contribute to an enchanted view of living, indicate that holistically a less defined approach is taken:

The point is that whatever form they take, Magic and Enchantment both lay claim to a special relationship to nature. The nature of that claim, however, couldn't be more different. The former brings all of nature under one rule, the rule of a set of universal laws to which there can be neither exception nor appeal; whereas the latter sees nature as endlessly plural, particular and unique. (That is why real Enchantment, from the scientific Magician's point of view, is literally useless) (Curry, 1999, p. 8).

Curry appears to be making a similar point to Hanegraaff in that contemporary magic is part of the disenchanted world. Understanding its existence as a real force however is part of an enchanted viewpoint in which a belief in magic and its magical

capabilities reinforce a sense of wonder that I have defined as being part of Pagan enchantment.

### ***Enchantment and secondary worlds***

Tolkien describes magic as being part of the primary world, while enchantment involves stepping into the secondary world, and some practitioners use terminology which supports the idea of other dimensions of being, describing their experience of them in terms of powerful and exceptional states of consciousness, which represents one type of enchantment. For example AD described his experience in terms of an altered state of consciousness:

Yeah. Enchantment is the high point in your life graph. What's going on when you're enchanted is, you're in trance, its entrancing to be enchanted and when you're in trance as Milton [Erickson] said – what you're doing is what's most important to you and that's what you're doing so if you constantly seek to be as entranced and enchanted in life as possible it means you're having a really good time. If you're having a really good time so that enchantment and entrancement stepping through the wardrobe into Narnia lights up your brain. Then that's what's called being human (AD).

KB's description of her experience of enchantment was more muted. It represented a broader, more everyday sense of enchantment engendered by living in a larger-than-human world, a world where magic could happen.

That's changed huge amounts during the phases. I would have said ritual once – but that's no longer true. I've kept an altar now for about 8 years and sitting by that is my sense of connection. Journeying/meditation/being outside is spiritual for me. The Chalice Well Gardens – I've just been there for the weekend. Just being there is spiritual. Being able to connect with the trees and well. It used to have to be crushed velvet robes and swords – but I don't see that as spiritual at all now (KB).

There are different ways that Pagans find enchantment. During this thesis I have focused on the desire to connect with an idealised land and the powerful feelings that this engenders for some Pagans but enchantment also occurs when the kind of intense trance-like experience is engendered by actual visits to Otherworld.

While Tolkien was discussing the creation of art as enchantment particularly in relation to imaginative stories, rather than focusing on the more rational use of magic for practical ends, for Pagans holding and expressing a sense of wonder for that which is inexplicable is a way of living and, I argue, it permeates their lives holistically – both in the primary realm and other realms. This is not to suggest that they live permanently in a state of perception of the magical. The perception of the magical arises at the moment that they make contact with a secondary realm, however their enchanted worldview remains whole even as they go about their lives in the primary realm: paying bills, washing up, dropping children off at school. Pagans do not often openly reject the positives of modern living in the primary realm – automatic washing machines, PlayStation games, the use of the internet, however they do exhibit a serious concern about such things being developed and used appropriately in a way that is not abusive to the natural world. In this way the worldview remains intact while in the primary realm, although what Curry describes as the sense of wonder, occurs at the point that the primary and secondary realms intertwine. Pagans are at once living in an enchanted and a disenchanted space, making sense of a modern world that prefers avowal towards one or the other.

Curry defines modernism as being characterised by the combination of three elements, these being modern science, a global capitalist economy, and the political power of the nation-state (2004, p. 12). Each of these areas can represent a threat to the natural world: science uses animals in experiments, revealing an underlying assumption

that other life-forms are of lower value than human, swathes of land and all that lives within it are destroyed in order to improve production, the state enforces new road-building programmes, often against the wishes of significant proportions of the population. Nature, and finding ways of engaging positively with it, lies at the core of the enchanted worldview of Pagans, and in this sense Paganism cannot be considered as a high modern phenomenon. Hutton outlines the history of contemporary Witchcraft (1999), viewing it as a development from the German Romanticism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and some contemporary practitioners would agree with this view: 'We are a bunch of romantics' (BP).

The terms modern and postmodern are ones whose meanings change shape dependent upon the speaker and the context of discussion. Harvey has spoken of Paganism as a signpost towards postmodernity offering 'polytheism with its pluralist and tolerant diversity' (1997, pp. 189-190), and Hutton has described Pagans as late moderns (1999). Perhaps different terminologies are being used to describe similar things. Paganism is a modern religion that sometimes displays a playful postmodernist attitude. Paganism is a developing religion nested within a developing modernity. It is plural in itself and establishing itself within and alongside other pluralities as part of the wider society of modern Britain. It may be imagining the past, but it is doing it as part of the present mode of thinking. It may be viewed as modern in the sense that Latour describes it, as it remains fluid and flexing in its self-awareness and positioning. It is a religion being created through continual process. One of the underlying intentions of Paganism is to forge a religion based in an imagined space of combination. Within this imagined space there lies the potential for wonder and for the mundane, as both are accepted and acceptable in a liminal place that is imagined as a point of convergence for different states of being.

Practitioners have remained enchanted through engagement with occultural activities and beliefs, within a society that has foregrounded an attitude of thought that is seemingly disenchanted. Enchanted people are actively constructing a religion to provide an enchanted framework, which presents a different face to that of the normative rationalist framework of being that has been prevalent in the West. Postmodernism however is more than just a rejection of modernity, it is an attitude that can be mocking, that refuses respect for metanarratives. It can more mildly simply seem playful, but it is a phenomenon that casts an ironic eye over the behemoths of modernity and, in this sense British Paganism is not postmodern in intent, neither in action. Rather it may be perceived as an umbrella term for a social grouping of people who are shamans (in their own usage of the term), practitioners of magic, healers, the ecstatic and inspired. Pagan activity not mocking in intent. Rather it is imbued with a sense of respect for nature and for living things. Pagans will challenge, but their intention is to affect positive change, rather than to deride. Paganism as an enchanted worldview enables the creation of a sphere of meaning in which everyday activity can be combined with a profound sense of the sacredness of the natural world. As many of its practitioners work in professions that involve care for others (human and non-human) then the enchantment of their worldview is carried into their everyday lives, with care being central to their viewpoint. This perhaps accounts for the types of professions that Pagans tend to work within – as nurses, teachers, social workers, counsellors.

Imagined Albion is a magical landscape for Pagans. They perceive it as a place infused with wonder, where life abounds in many forms not necessarily perceived in wider society to be alive and where there are many possibilities. This is in contrast to the secular world, where laws and rules for living abound.

Magic then, as understood by Pagans, is a practical act of the will working through the wider network of energies that encompass all, while the perception of the magical i.e. that which may be described as supernatural or, in Todorovian terms could be described as the marvellous: breaking the known natural laws, induces a sense of wonder. The enchanted viewpoint of this religion arises from the combination of respect for the natural world, with an appreciation for and experience of the supernatural world, as well as a desire for immersion in place.

## **Conclusions**

If this discussion of Paganism offers a case study of a small but distinct arena of enchantment within modern British society then it also offers a challenge to Weber's prediction that scientific rationality and the processes of intellectual progression would lead to the demise of perceptions of the magical. Pagans largely represent a group of educated persons, and its leading practitioners at the current time are of an age-group to have received a modern education with a focus on categorisation, evidence, fact and proof and yet their perception of the magical remains.

Does Paganism represent a case study for re-enchantment in Britain? The description 'coming home' seems to deny this. Practitioners are formulating a religion that expresses enchantment, or joining the religion because it enables them to express their enchantment in company with like-minded others. They are already enchanted at the point at which they become practitioners, which is a reason as to why the religion feels like 'home.' If they are already enchanted at the point of beginning to express their religion, then Paganism does not represent a re-enchantment in the culture. It is a coming together of a group of persons that have identified a similar worldview and are sharing it. The shared beliefs and perceptions that they have brought together have been

formulated prior to the practice of the religion and found in substantive myth, imagined histories, fantasy story, a love of the natural world and experience of a sense of place. All of these arenas of experience are ones that cannot be, as Weber described it, mastered by calculation.

## Chapter Nine: Personhood and healing the divide

Paganism is a religion centrally concerned with celebrating nature (Harvey 2000, p. 155).

This quotation from Harvey represents the most immediate element of Paganism that is usually conveyed, both by practitioners and by academics and is a useful starting point when beginning to examine this religion. Pagans spend much of their time in activities that are intended to protect or conserve or respect the living elements of the natural world that surrounds us. Harvey has also described how some Pagans actively incorporate their attitude of reverence towards nature by engaging in protests designed to protect the environment such as road-building projects (2005, pp. 82-95). Such activities are immediate and public but he also makes the point that ‘activism and quietism are in tension as possible modes of performing Paganism’ (2005, p. 86). Solitary or ‘hedge’ practitioners find other less public ways of engaging in the protection and nurture of the natural world, but which contain a similar intent. This may range from recycling of waste products to being the person who stands on the chair at the office window to ensure the safe escape of a trapped wasp. These last examples that demonstrate respect for other life forms reveal how some Pagans express an animist worldview, which contributes to their enchanted worldview.

It is largely accepted that Paganism is a religion that celebrates nature but I argue that it is a religion that celebrates cultural activity also in the primary world – both disenchanted activities and those that help to create the imagined human and other-than-human communities of Albion and that it is an attempt by practitioners to draw together the nature-culture divide that is central to the modern worldview. Pagans are products of a modern cultural education. Their religion may be in the process of becoming, as a response to certain conditions of modernity, but it stems from that



worldview and is being constructed from within that worldview. It remains a construction in which participants wish to maintain elements of the modern world that they enjoy, while incorporating aspects of their imagined older worldview in order to try to heal the divisions that may be considered to have been created by the nature-culture divide. This entwining of modern ideas with an earlier approach enables a worldview that acknowledges both the primary and secondary worlds. The place and places of Britain are the integrating factors. Within this wider realm kinship can be developed with other persons both human and, as Harvey describes them, following Hallowell, 'other-than-human' (2005). In this chapter I argue that Paganism is attempting to draw together multiple connections, both old and new from this desire to repair the nature-culture divide, an intent that is taken seriously even when, as some Pagans do, it is approached humorously in practice.

### **Quietist responses to nature**

There are Pagans who for varied reasons do not choose to publicly enact their beliefs, but prefer to do so in private settings, perhaps sharing with another or several others in the way that they undertake their practice. This may be as simple as chatting over a glass of wine or beer while deconstructing the meanings in the latest *Dr Who* episode, to climbing into an oak tree simply to be with that tree, to scanning the land at their feet in search of a stone that speaks to them.

I have a habit of collecting stones from places that seem meaningful to me. I almost go into a trance-like state as I let my eyes scan the ground in front of me and I only collect a stone if it indicates to me that it wishes to be collected. I pick up many pebbles to look at them more closely but I only keep the ones that allow me to. A couple of friends, knowing that I collect stones but not really understanding why, have tried to add to my 'collection'. This makes me sad in a way. I keep the stones they've collected for me, out of respect both for the gift and for the stone itself, but

they are not family in the same way the others are. I don't try to use them in the way that other Pagans do. I'm not a crystal collector. These are simply stones that are choosing to be with me. We're a kind of a collective (DI).

DI is acknowledging the personhood of the particular stones that belong to this collective. For her, these persons exist in the primary world and are part of the community of all beings in every dimension that are tied into place.

### *Stone and story*

An enchanted viewpoint about stones runs throughout the novels of Alan Garner. His novels almost always involve stones of importance, which exhibit a sentience. The Weirdstone winks with the magic at the heart of it. The rock that holds the gates to Fundindelve remains resolute against trespass, the bunty holds together time and space and history, the swaddledidaff connects together the sacred landscape of Cheshire with the sacredness of the Australian landscape (*Strandloper*, 1996), the hidden cave paintings represent the connection between human culture and living rock (*The Stone Quartet*, 1999). In Pagan understanding stone represents a part of the element of Earth, which is most often celebrated as being of the spirits of the North.

Stone is perhaps celebrated in this reverential way because of its enduring quality. The same stones that were seen, touched and engaged with by the ancestors are the ones that are available to contemporary Pagans. They are located within space and represent the repositories of time, and experience that can be reasonably foreseen to continue into the future. They are representatives of that desire for posterity, the need to belong to something valuable through time, which remains important to practitioners. Stone plays a similar role for Pagans to that of the older myth stories. It is a representation of the presence of those that have gone before.

Quietist practitioners are those least likely to make public declarations of their Paganism and it is hard to judge how many of them there are. One practitioner who, in her visible public life is a Christian vicar's wife and dresses and acts as the parishioners might expect, also attends Pagan camps and engages whole-heartedly in rituals, but is unable or unwilling to declare her own religion publicly.

### **The 'cult of ruins'**

Celebrations of stone are often publicly made at Stonehenge or Avebury circle, particularly at the times of the winter and summer solstices, but lesser known circles are also frequent places of activity. The Nine Ladies stone circle in Derbyshire is a place where Pagans go. Sometimes there are formal rituals enacted there, with wax pentagrams being drawn with candles around the exterior of the circle. However, visitors to the circle often include walkers and families drawn to the apparent history, or idly observing the campers that often sit outside their tents, within yards of the circle, playing guitars or stroking their dogs. Very often these temporary residents are celebrants openly performing their Pagan beliefs, hanging charms or offerings upon the oak tree that stands just outside the circle. Further into the surrounding woods adept carvings may be found, celebrating the wood itself. There is a sense that this is a community space under the protection of the celebrants, but where all are welcome: dogs, children, trees, sheep, bank managers, jackdaws and Pagans.

There is no formal ritual but observation shows that many human parties follow a similar path in approaching the circle, stopping first to read the information board that tells of Bronze Age cremations, walking over to examine or visit with the gift tree, nodding to or acknowledging others before walking up to the circle and stopping just outside the stones to observe. Although a few may walk into or across the circle there

appears to be an underlying understanding by many visitors, whether openly Pagan, quietly Pagan, or casual visitors, that this is sacred space, and a halt is made. Most then quietly leave, striking off past the King Stone or along one of the many other paths that converge at this place. Some celebrants may be glimpsed in the surrounding landscape sitting quietly in meditation, or perhaps journeying. The smells of incense may be in the air. On a different occasion a handfasting ceremony may be taking place within the circle itself; passing visitors stopping to listen in for a while before quietly moving on. For more formal occasions such as this, special clothing may be being worn by the celebrants – velveteen dresses, floral headdresses, or leggings and tabards. The passing visitors may be in walkers' gear – hiking boots and goretex, but some of them may be Pagans whose preference is to practise privately, engaging with all of the life around them.

For Pagans there is a link between stones and ancestry and the landscape, which leads them to visit and venerate ancient stone circles. Smith posits that this kind of linkage is representative of the desire to create a sense of nationhood.

How tangible and practical is the nationalist spatial vision. It demands a terrain on which nations can be built. But the vision also contains an unearthly note, an element of archaic mystery, particularly where the environment yields up vestiges of a pre-history that antedates the community... modern communities are excited and dignified by their association with prehistoric civilizations, but also uneasy at the thought of their extinction and the sheer passage of time to which these landscapes and their material remains bear silent witness. An attitude of fear and veneration emerges, and this spills over into the romantic obsession with nature which ends as a cult of nature-worship (1986, pp. 184-185).

He describes what he calls the 'cult of ruins':

Practically every type of building or monument can be naturalized and turned into a component of the community's environment... Some ruins

possess exceptional importance for the self-definition and title-deeds of ethnic homelands... the monuments, then, bear witness to and express a sense of unique identity based upon a claim to be a valued terrain in virtue of age-long residence and possession... Holy places of man-made or natural origins are crucial for identifying *ethnie*, both in the past and today, because they evoke forces greater than the individual and induce feelings of awe and reverence by their historic associations and symbolic meanings... For one cultural aspiration of a returning intelligentsia and middle class is the yearning for the spiritual wholeness represented by the countryside and the 'natural' life, as an antidote to the materialism and competitive individualism of city existence (1986, pp. 186-190).

For Pagans, rather than representing an ethnic nationalist vision, stone represents land and age, and land represents the connecting factor with community that exists throughout the ages. These visible signs of the lives of those persons that have gone before can generate the awe that Smith describes, and in stone circles all that is of value to Pagans is drawn together, represented, and celebrated. These places are not merely historical spaces but they are alive with all persons, both human and other-than-human, and they contain all that has been. Pagans visit stone circles throughout Britain, for example that at Callanish on the isle of Lewis, or the Rollright stones in Oxfordshire. British Pagans may also visit the stones at Carnac in Brittany, understanding there to be a historical connection between the originators of these stones, and those on the landmass of Britain itself. The stones, however, that are the ones that most Pagans acknowledge as being of central importance in the celebrations of Paganism, are the ones at Stonehenge in Wiltshire. The mystery surrounding its construction and the evident high level of commitment involved in constructing this monumental work seem to indicate a strong ancestral relationship with the stones, which resonates with present-day Pagans. Here contemporary Pagans can engage with the other-than-human stone

persons in the primary world, at the same time as with the ancestors in a different time dimension.

### **Enjoying the modern**

The remains of fire pits often sit not far from the tents of the temporary residents at the Nine Ladies, leaving blackened holes and rings of stone. Camping gas stoves are not in evidence. Celebration of the element of fire has taken place in an apparently traditional way. The constructions that the celebrants are living in however are not rough-hewn. The light blues and yellows of the tents bent low over the ground contrast sharply with the greens and browns of the natural environment. These are shop-bought homes, waterproof, wind-proof and efficient at keeping out the elements. These celebrants are here to more closely engage with the natural environment but not so closely that they wish to embrace its potential for discomfort. Pagans have been born into a modern world; a world of technological advantage and even as they decry road-building they put diesel into their cars in order to travel to sacred sites.

Not all that is technological is rejected by Pagans. Their concern is to create a way of living that incorporates that which is of use and is non-damaging from the modern world with imagined values of an earlier age, which is considered to have celebrated a kinship with other-than-humans. A regard for craftsmanship, which threads through much of a Pagan worldview may also be seen in the modern regard for industriousness and the honour accorded for skilled labour, also valued in pre-industrial society. Many Pagans take pride in producing by hand wands, art, musical instruments, and jewellery inspired by techniques and designs of the older cultures of pre-Christian Britain. Celtic and Anglo-Saxon symbols adorn necklaces and rings. Many Pagans wear torques. Pottery and paintings adorn many of the stalls that abound at Pagan gatherings.

There is an underlying reverence for the act of making revealed in workshops that teach how to grow herbs and produce remedies such as sleep-inducing pillows. Wood-worked plaques of the goddess jostle for selling space alongside hand-made incense. Pagans enjoy consuming these products that are redolent of craft and a personal relationship between maker and made. If they have not experienced this same relationship for themselves they can buy from someone who has and therefore be only one step away.

### **New animism and enchantment**

In his discussion of the concept of new animism, by which he means a recognition that personhood can exist in a variety of others that are not human, whether they are, within a modern context, designated as living or not, Harvey says:

One of the central and insistent implications of animisms is that particular places and lands are vitally important... Particular waters, airs, minerals, spaces, horizons, climates, seasons and weathers mould the diverse specificities that together are the community of life. Material, intellectual and spiritual cultures are rooted in all that surrounds and enfolds them... Places are not only environments and ecologies but persons, individuals, agents, active and relational beings, participants in the wider ecology of life (2005, p. 109).

Animism in traditional societies may be part of the understood received worldview. Harvey gives the example of Hallowell asking an old man of the Ojibwe whether *all* of the stones they could see were alive. The old man hesitated before answering no, but that some were. Harvey then states: 'If all rocks or stone-objects that we encounter were obviously alive, the old man would never have hesitated' (2005, p. 33). Perhaps an alternative interpretation may be that the old man may have hesitated because he was asked a question that he had never had to consciously consider before. Perhaps within his received worldview this matter was a taken for granted. For British Pagans an animist way of seeing, in the terms in which Harvey posits it, as a recognition

of personhood, is not part of the received secular worldview and for them it is a developing way of understanding that contributes to their enchanted way of living. Multiple connections are perceived all around them: persons from the natural world in the forms of rocks, birds, plant-life, and other animals, persons from the secondary world in the forms of spirit-guides, house guardians and the fey, and ancestor persons from the past.

Some Pagans regard magical creatures as metaphors rather than as living persons, but some undertake journeying experiences to meet with these other-than-human living realities. They work with them and maintain awareness that not all of these persons work with positive intent.

Before journeying I always put in place a level of protection and anyone I meet I test out at least three times to ensure what I'm dealing with. I never end a journey without ensuring that I bring nothing and no one back unintentionally (DI).

### **Relations with ancestors**

The need to establish roots: a sense of connection to and engagement with the land via an imagined cultural identity, lies at the heart of Pagan reverence for ancestry and their perceived ancestors, whether their link to those ancestors is proven or idealised. A passion for ancestry also denotes a respect for age, which in a British culture that exhibits a fascination with the young and their activities – pop music, fashion, the lives and opinions of young people that live in Essex or Chelsea which are broadcast to millions and which have thousands of words dedicated to them in newspapers and magazines – is notable. The accumulated knowledge that may be achieved by the experience of years of living holds gravitas and, for Pagans, the wisdom of the older woman is a recurring and important theme. This is a distinct recognition of the older woman that is not necessarily reflected within the wider society within Britain, or not to



the same level, and may form part of the attraction that Paganism holds for many of its practitioners. For example, in the magazine of The Children of Artemis *Witchcraft & Wicca* Mary Rands writes on aspects of the crone (the Pagan third aspect of the goddess, following maiden and mother):

Even today we use this image (**ugly old woman**) in a derogatory sense as we do the word 'hag'. Sad to say it has worked only too well in the way we, the 'civilised west', treat our older generations – especially the females – without any respect... When you next see an old woman, look for the beauty of the Crone within, the greatest honour we could do her is to once more revere the old woman in society, pagan or not, for the Gods are in us all, like it or not ( 2003, p. 48).

The particular ancestries that are revered within different pathways also indicate the types of community that an individual wishes to relate to. For Heathens it is Germanic ancestry, with value placed on noble action and hard work, for Druids it is Celtic, a more romantic ideal with value placed on art and intellect, and for Witches there is a desire to connect with a woman-centred, empowering ancestry. In establishing an imagined connection with ancestors, a feeling of continuing tradition may be established, whether or not it is an imagined tradition. A concern with the future and establishing a sense of posterity for forthcoming generations is also revealed within this concern for establishing a tradition. As Linde has argued, the creation of a Life Story requires a notion of sequence: 'Narrative order is the basis for the two major coherence principles of life stories: causality and continuity' (1993, p. 127).

I argue that each of the pathways within Paganism in Britain is attempting to reconnect to imagined ancient ancestries in order to establish a sense of continuity as part of the process of identity formation. Heathenry and Druidry may be attempts to create an imagined indigenous religion that is specifically of place. Witches also hold a perception that their Craft is a peculiarly English practice. Druids are reclaiming the

image of the Celt in order to construct their sense of Albion and Heathens are using the practical, hard-working image of the Anglo-Saxon. In discussing the ancestors Harvey writes:

More important, in those cultures in which they are significant, the term 'ancestors' is most often used to refer to specific, named individuals and not merely to some amorphous and vague conglomeration of all who have died. Merely genealogical interest is not enough, it can be vitally important to know and use the names of ancestors in addressing them (2005, p. 125).

Pagan interest in ancestors however, often appears to be genealogical and diffuse rather than person specific. Within a ritual that invites the elements and other-than-human participants to join in, the invocation of the ancestors is just that. Individuals may vary in the words used but most often there is some variant of, *I call upon the ancestors...* with no further specification, which allows those involved to create their own interpretation of meaning. Within more private practice it may be that specific ancestors are addressed but the terminology of Paganism suggests a more generalised respect for the wisdom of those that have gone before. This stems from the desire to establish a connection, but with an ancestry so far back in time that the specifics have been lost or become vague.

I believe that people who have passed on could still be there. They pass you messages. They guide you. They're still there. My distant ancestors were Vikings but they were in touch with nature and had an overall lifestyle that I aspire to and a set of values (DB).

In this quotation four words are of relevance in the importance of ancestors for Pagans and these are *distance*, *nature*, *lifestyle* and *values*. The distance allows for greater interpretation, the involvement with nature draws together age with a proper understanding of that which is of central importance within Paganism, the lifestyle is an

implied one in which an engagement with all of nature, including other-than-humans, establishes a set of values which offer respect and kinship to all persons.

SU, a Heathen, described the ancestors as those that are on another plane: ‘At Hasfest they are there but just in another dimension. They’re not really gone, they’re always there.’

Druidry celebrates the perceived knowledge of the ancestors, linking that lost knowledge to a way of living that, if connected with again, would mean that a correct relationship with nature and with *this land* would become available. For example Philip Carr-Gomm writes an invocation saying:

Oh that I could see to the Other Realm – that I could learn the magic of the Ancients. Oh that the secrets of the Wise Ones could be whispered in my ears that I might know their beauty and their power – that I might love again this land and hear the voices of the Goddess and the God in the trees and in the rivers (2002c, p. 37).

The blending of aspects of the modern world with an animist respect for the ancestors is exemplified by Facebook status updates delivered at Samhain, the festival that celebrates that which has passed including the dead and the ancestors. Examples at Samhain 2013 included:

Blessings this Samhain to you all and our beloved ancestors (GH).

and:

For all my ancestors who stand behind me, I ask for your wisdom and magic to support your latest descendant – soon to stand before us all.

Happy samhuin [sic] and I hope it’s fun behind the veil. X (LP).

These celebratory hailing of the ancestors thus connect a network of technology, human persons and other-than-humans inclusively.

The website of HAD (Honouring The Ancient Dead) a Pagan initiative that is concerned with the appropriate reburial of ancient bones unearthed by archaeologists or during building works, contains this opening statement:

Honouring the Ancient Dead is a British initiative that advocates respect for what are commonly called ‘human remains’ and their related funereal artefacts (HAD, 1999).

Further explanation is given of the purpose of HAD:

HAD aims to present a particular perspective with regard to the ancestors, one that perceives the ancestors as still being integral and influencing members of the community. For animists and pantheists, this may be through a deeper consciousness within nature; for others, this is based simply on the legacy of ancestral lives, our memories of them, and our ongoing interaction with both those elements.

Here the key words are the *ancestors*, *integral* and *influencing*.

The terminology *the ancestors* is a genealogical term rather than a specific one, although this may be due to the situation that HAD is inclusive of supporters that are not necessarily Pagan but have a generic respect for the rights of long-dead persons, although the emphasis is on those who perceive the ancestors as an integrated part of the community now, with the ability to cast influence upon it.

The description on the site continues:

As ongoing members of the community, the ancestral dead continue to be persons, in other words, the ancestors are still individuals who have the right to be treated with respect. This includes the physicality of their bones, cremated ash, and other bodily elements that may be found. HAD believes that this perspective is widely held, both instinctively and philosophically.

Key phrases in this passage are ongoing members, continue to be persons, individuality, respect and physicality.

Even though these individuals are dead in the accepted sense of the term the implication is that there is an ongoing community of persons that belong to *the* community (of all persons) and that what they were and are is embodied in their remains, which must therefore be afforded respect as one member of a community to another.

### **Developing an imagined indigenous religion**

On the website of the Pagan Federation, Heathenry is described:

Heathenry is a living religion based on literary and archaeological sources for the religious practices of a particular pre-Christian culture and extended by the relationships of modern Heathens with their gods. It differs from Wicca and other modern day non-reconstructionist Pagan paths in a number of ways. Perhaps the primary difference is that Heathens are 'hard polytheists': they honour a large number of individual gods, goddesses and other spiritual beings whom they see as existing independently from humans. And in common with many indigenous religions world-wide, they also honour their ancestors (Pagan Federation, 2012).

This description is of note in that, while it does not directly claim that Heathenry is an indigenous religion in Britain, it aligns Heathenry with other indigenous religions particularly because those religions honour ancestors. There is an underlying suggestion that the honouring of ancestors is part of what makes a religion indigenous.

There is also an implication that this religion is well-sourced via academic means to ensure that it is as far as possible continuing a valid practice established by those ancestors. The perceived traditional way of life is approached in a way that might be considered modern. Scientific explanation is fused with spiritual understanding.

I think of a heathen spirit as being the continuation of the dna of our ancestors in us, and it's movement forward [sic] in our offspring. This dna allows a genetic contact with our forefathers and contains the essence

of the deeds (positive or otherwise) of these folk. This is the central spirit in my perspective. To sum up and use a well known euphamism [sic]: ‘we are our deeds’ and the deeds of those who came before (OS).

Heathens look for community and all the connections that go with that.

That’s really important to them (SU).

Community in this sense is more than just a gathering together of like-minded individuals. SU explained that Heathens wait to form new kindreds until all involved are satisfied that this is what they are collectively ready to do. It is not possible to belong to more than one community.

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter I have argued that Paganism represents a desire to imaginatively fuse perceived ancient and modern persons and practices within an enchanted framework that acknowledges all persons that dwell in the immediately understood realm including humans and other-than-humans, and includes those that dwell in the less immediate secondary dimensions. This enchanted framework is imagined Albion.

## Chapter Ten: Imagining a sacred landscape: Developing identity of belonging and the enchantment of place

But we never built churches. We didn't need to. The land was the church.  
The land was the religion... (Gaiman, 2001, p.556).

Granting a degree of post-modern hyperbole in the contemporary characterizations of the world as sheer unbounded flux and flow, it is nevertheless clear to even the most sober observer that territory and boundaries are a central concern of our time (Johnson, 2005, p. 37).

In the previous chapters I have discussed some of the main elements of interest that together forge the Pagan worldview. These have included imagined histories based in pre-Christian Britain, the mythologies that support these imaginings, Pagan appreciations of multi-dimensionality and recognition for that which may be considered supernatural in the primary world, through magic and other-than human states of being, and the type of indigenous fantasy that Pagans use to stimulate their imaginings of natural places suffused with the supernatural. In this chapter I consider what it is that integrates these areas, which is a desire to be rooted in place while simultaneously acknowledging unboundedness through the multi-dimensional aspect of their sacred landscape. From this practitioners are engaged in forging a sense of connecting identity.

I consider argument from Yi Fu Tuan (2009) that religion lies along the continuum between place and placelessness, and I examine Paganism against Smith's (1986) argument for there being an ethnic origin to the formation of nations, arguing for a more nuanced approach in understanding community formation for Pagans. In this I posit that Johnson's (2005) model of the *indigeneous* as a modern strategy for considering ideologies of permanence and territorial stability is more relevant in relation to discussion of what it is that Pagans are doing. I consider Anderson's (2006) argument

that theories regarding nationalism, which focus on the modern political nature of the nation-state, struggle to explain its subjective antiquity in the eyes of members of nations. I offer the argument that the imagining of place and community, instilling feelings of connectedness and belonging, provokes a type of enchantment, exemplified by Paganism, which is difficult to explain in terms of the disenchanted political dimensions of the nation-state. I examine Hall's (2013) argument that the formation of cultural identity can be regarded not as a position but a process and argue that Paganism is a framework of shared imaginings that encompasses the differences of individuals.

### **Between place and placelessness**

Religion stems from the continuum that lies between desire for place and the security of rootedness, and the movement away from place and the desire for new experience, argues Yi Tu Fuan (2009). I posit that this tension between the bounded and the boundless is the source of enchantment for Pagans. For them it can also be seen in the space that lies between their engagement with the substantive myth stories that they utilise in their imagining of place, providing a sense of location, and their engagement with fantasies of place that allow for imagined dimensions that are tied into locality.

Their imagined landscape is *Albion*, a multi-dimensional space that incorporates the contemporary world, the past, the future, and all beings considered to be living, both magical and non-magical. The fixed coordinates for *Albion* in time and space rest in the area that in the contemporary world is known as Britain. Britain is a place of operations that occur in a frequently secular and disenchanted dimension. It is a place, the boundaries of which are fixed by State borders. It is regarded as a nation-state that is formed in and from its political and economic recognitions in the primary world. *Albion*, as it is imagined, is at once a place of boundaries and a boundless space. Its



boundaries are delineated by the cultural understandings forged in the imaginings of practitioners via chosen histories and stories, and by its geographical contours. The limitless dimensions that it represents characterise its boundlessness. Its sacredness for Pagans lies in the engagements between their regard for locality of place and the sense of wonder, which arises for them from its boundlessness; the relationship between place and space. The ever-moving and ungraspable arena of the boundless arouses feelings of wonder, standing as it does against the fragile dimensions of the individual self. Its overwhelming size provokes awe and the desire to belong, and to acknowledge that the self, however small, is at once a part of this huge and meaningful arena. Pagans acknowledge that all life forms, in every dimension, form part of this seemingly limitless arena, and in that way, have regard for all of them. I characterise the feeling that this combination of regard for locality and awe towards the boundless that Pagans experience, as enchantment.

Enchantment of place and connection enables the construction of a religious identity that is forged for Pagans in an underlying conception of indigeneity. Strong feelings of enchanted connection to place and the communities which stem from it can become embroiled and confused from an outside viewpoint, as feelings akin to those that are considered to be an integral part of nationalism.

This kind of nationalism, in which state boundaries and involvement in the arena of politics take precedence, does not effectively explain the connection felt by Pagans, and how and why Pagans are imagining Albion.

In relation to Paganism it does not take account of the gentler, more delicate feelings of enchantment of place that Pagans express in their ritual activities, poetry, songs and conversations. Explanations for these feelings as a desire for an ethnic connection to place do not take account of the intended inclusivity of Paganism. A more

nuanced model in the attempt to make sense of Pagan connection to a home of their imagining can be made by examining Anderson's (2006) *nation-ness* and Johnson's (2005) *indigeneity*. In the following sections I examine these areas in more depth.

## **Nationalism**

Gellner (2006) argues that humans have always lived in groups to which they feel loyal. He describes this factor generally as 'patriotism' and goes on to define nationalism as a very distinctive type of patriotism that becomes pervasive only if the society is culturally homogenous, is striving to be a high literate culture and is a large enough entity to sustain an educational system through which to keep that literate culture going. There are not many rigid internal sub-groupings and the population is anonymous, mobile and unmediated. Homogeneity, literacy and anonymity are the key traits. An individual belongs to a nation directly, in virtue of his or her cultural style and not due to membership of nested sub-groups. For Gellner the large centralised state is dependent for its perpetuation on a centralised educational system, and it monopolises 'legitimate culture' as much, or more so, than it monopolises 'legitimate violence'. An industrial high culture is no longer linked, as agrarian ones were, to a faith and a church. For him, what becomes important in a high culture are the shared generic skills that define it as a nation. Such a culture becomes a natural social unit which cannot survive without its own political shell: the State. Pagans in Britain may hold British nationality. They may hold passports, pay taxes, support national sport teams, and follow the laws of State. All of this may be described as nationalist activity in the sense of belonging to a nation-state. This kind of activity however does not explain their religious behaviour or sentiment in relation to the imagined place of Albion.

Smith (1986) suggests that recent historians and social scientists have considered the idea of 'nation' to be a modern creation. He suggests that perhaps there is a link however between earlier periods in history and ethnic sentiments, and feelings of contemporary 'nationhood'.

Uprooted and homeless masses are equally eager to proclaim their allegiance to politically effective units to which they can feel (or be induced to feel) they 'belong'; and what better way of suggesting and inducing that sense of belonging than by 'rediscovering' submerged or lost ethnic roots in the mists of immemorial time? (1986, p. 2).

Needing a history and destiny to overcome death and futility, communities like nations must find them in the cults of nature and the heroic past. The returning intelligentsia, in particular, needs a living past into which it can re-enter, and it uses disciplines like archaeology and philology to reconstruct those poetic spaces and golden ages in which the 'nation' can and must locate itself. The monuments of nature and history, and the cult of heroes, help to keep 'disenchantment' at bay and shape the new nation through the ethnic 'maps' and 'moralities' they evoke (1986, p. 5).

These comments of Smith if overlaid as a template on the intent of Paganism as a religion may initially offer some points of similarity in terms of the intent of Paganism to forge communities that are sourced in an imagined past. The religion is a place of belonging for its practitioners (a place to come home to), based on a belief in shared cultural roots from pre-Christian Britain, the poetic spaces and golden ages found in myth and fantasy stories, and especially in the Matter of Britain, and in the ancient stone monuments perceived as integral to the history of the land. This is not a civic-territorial or nation-state connection but one based in a feeling of cultural connection to place and history. Despite surface similarities to Paganism however, the idea that this type of sentiment is based on understandings of ethnic connection to place and culture does not adequately explain the importance of imagined Albion for Pagans. Imagined Albion is a

multi-dimensional place in which the ontological reality and authenticity of all its occupants are recognised and given respect by Pagans. There is no Other against which self can be defined. Suggestions of belonging based on ethnic connection hold connotations of non-belonging for Other, which lies at odds with the inclusive intent of Paganism for many Pagans.

Examining the music and poetry that Pagan Druidry regularly encourages and that its practitioners consider to be of fundamental importance within their belief and practice it becomes apparent that this pathway is imbued with a gentler vision of Britain as Albion, based on an idealisation of the land as a living, enchanted environment that persists throughout the ages regardless of the cultural crises that may be occurring within the lives of its current inhabitants. Damh the Bard (of OBOD) sums this feeling up succinctly in his song *The Spirit of Albion*.

An isle so fair, an isle so green,  
Known by many names.  
Feel the pulse, the pulse of the land,  
The blood boils within your veins.  
Someone go down to the Holy Well  
and raise the Spirits there!  
Lay a feather on a stone,  
with a flame, and a lock of hair.

(Chorus)

The Crane, the wolf,  
the bear and the boar,  
No longer dwell upon these shores,  
You say that the Goddess and God  
have gone,  
Well I tell you they live on!  
For in the cities and hills,  
And in circles of stone,

The voices of the Old Ways,  
The Spirit of Albion is calling you home! (Smith, 2008).

Druid magazine *Touchstone*, published quarterly, contains poems written by members of OBOD, that celebrate the land, containing lines such as:

And I'll guide you where the ancient footsteps lead  
To the sacred places that lie still and quiet in the land (October issue,  
2012).

Within Witchcraft, connection with the land and its annual cycle of the seasons is important in establishing the sense of continuity represented by ancestry.

The quickening ritual, the awakening will be the next one (festival) because the Earth is beginning to wake up so it's the quickening of the end of Winter, beginning of Spring. So it's a case of you honour that aspect of the season and you make a lot of noise at ritual to wake the Earth up and to mark the passage. Stamp your feet a lot, bang the drums and wake the ground up. You think about what seeds you need to plant in your life to bring a good harvest later in the year. Our ancestors would have readied the seeds at this time ready for planting in Spring (JA).

Although as previously discussed Witchcraft is seen as an old religion, indeed *the* Old Religion that was born in Britain, practitioners often cite it as the only indigenous religion to stem from this particular geographical area. The belief that this religion stems from this land is an important element in this particular pathway.

## **Posterity**

Paganism in Britain is an emerging religion within a culture that has largely been educated to accept a secular understanding of history. Smith's (1986, p. 176) conclusion is that communities that are 'sundered' from a religious anchorage need to re-anchor themselves and find a meaning that ensures an immortality. They do this with an emphasis on posterity and that which can be carried into the future. Posterity also needs a history to explain its continuity through time and therefore there is a need for an

acknowledged ancestry. Many current Pagan practitioners cite Christianity as their early received religion, from which for various reasons they have moved away. In this sense they have been sundered from the religious anchoring that represented the majority of religious people in Britain for several centuries and their move towards Paganism represents a religious re-anchoring for them, that includes within it a sense of posterity when looking to the future, which is validated by the past. Acknowledgement of ancestry is a key element within Paganism, but the ancestors called upon are those that have gone before, the ones with the wisdom of the past, they are generic rather than a specific set of characters within a defined genealogical context.

### **Golden ages**

All three major pathways within Paganism look back to a golden age, a time that represents virtuous values and a period of splendour. Witches look back to a time when they were the respected 'wyse' ones within their communities. Heathens hark back to the strong bonds of family, friendships and noble values, while Druids look back to a time when intellect, justice and art prevailed. These are models that bind the individuals together within their pathways as they seek to locate themselves within their idealised imagined place.

Witchcraft practitioners see their spatial origins in Britain, Druidry in Britain and northern France, and Heathens in northern Europe and then Britain. Ancestors stem from all of these places. Some Druids consider that Celtic forbears descended from Indo-European migrations, and Heathens look to the migrations from the North. Witchcraft looks to religious freedom stemming from the repeal of the Witchcraft Act in 1957. The myth of the enchanted age of Arthur and Merlin provides a focus for all three of these Pagan pathways as the image of a once golden age of magic and enchantment

leading to a sleeping hero who will return to bring back a new golden age. The hero is the exemplification of the golden age. In an episode of *Merlin* aired on television channel BBC1 on 12th November 2011 Gaius (Merlin's mentor) says:

For the Druids' legends are true. Merlin... is... Emrys and destined for greatness. A man who will one day unite the powers of the old world and the new and bring the time that the poets speak of. The time of Albion.

In one of the essays in Alan Garner's work *The Voice That Thunders* he makes a statement that gives a summation to what he has tried to create within his work and which works also to encapsulate the integrating factor for Paganism:

the essence of the Island of the Mighty, the essence of Being, must not be lost (1997, p. 207).

The disenchantment caused by the conditions of modernity represents for Pagans a complex myth of decline. The myth of the restoration of understanding, and practice of Paganism enables a sense of rebirth.

Some of the elements of Smith's *ethnic-genealogical* model of the development of nations do resonate with what Paganism is doing but for them connection to place is an enchantment rather than a sense of ethnic connection.

### **Nation-ness and indigeneity**

Anderson (2006) offers a more fruitful and provocative approach to understanding people's relationships with nations. He defines the nation as an imagined political community, saying that nations should be distinguished not by their falseness or their genuineness but by the style of their imagining. For him the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship which has allowed for the willing self-sacrifice of millions of people prepared to die for their nation. He poses the level of emotional attachment to an imagined community that is required to provoke such huge self-

sacrifice as the central problem for theories of nationalism to explain. He argues that rather than focusing on the idea of the nation as one with 'roots in fear and hatred of the Other, and its affinities with racism' it is also useful to consider that nations 'inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love' as shown through its cultural products (2006, p. 141) This suggests that it is much rarer to find cultural products that express fear and loathing. He argues that nationalist imagining has an affinity to religious imagining as an attempt to respond to notions of death and immortality and that the emergence of nationalism was partially a response to religious imagining becoming less certain during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: 'What was then required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning' (2006, p. 11). The idea of the nation was best suited for this.

As he argues, political and sociological explanations of the nation seem to have difficulty in making sense of the deeply emotional attachments that are made to it, that can make it worthwhile dying for in large numbers. I argue that attachment to something that is larger and more meaningful than the self is a generic element in the definition of enchantment, and that, for Pagans, their imagining of Albion, is an act of enchantment. Albion is not a nation in the generally accepted sense but it is a meaningful place to which they can belong and which is integrated with Britain in the primary world. Initially it may seem that they are providing a nationalist response that might be viewed superficially in terms of a political engagement with the idea of the nation-state. In response to Anderson's posing of the difficulty that theoreticians have when attempting to understand nationalist sentiment that imagines the subjective antiquity of the nation, I argue that attachment to an imagined place and imagined communities is a form of enchantment in itself and that Paganism represents this type of enchantment.



An even more useful model to consider in relation to Paganism might be Johnson's model of the indigenous:

the indigenous is a quite modern discursive style and strategy which at least in part responds to crises of dislocation, such that the more actual transformation and mobility encountered, the more valued the ideology of unchanging permanence and territorial stability become (2005, p. 37).

In discussing two particular communities, the Candomblé of Brazil and the Garifuna of the Caribbean, Johnson defines them as indigenous by which he means, 'they imagine themselves in the indigenous form – as, in their own self-understanding and presentation, oriented towards and originally related to a particular place.' (2005, p. 64). An understanding of Pagan experience of place as this kind of oriented connection coupled with an enchanted sense of belonging, not just to locality but to everything that is a part of that locality in all dimensions, offers a nuanced interpretation of what Paganism is expressing through its relationship with imagined Albion.

### **Developing identity**

In their search for a place of belonging, a place which feels like 'home', Pagans are engaged in developing an identity for themselves. The conditions of modernity, Giddens (1991) argues, have led to self-reflexivity becoming an integral outcome. He posits the emergence of new mechanisms of self-identity which are shaped by and also shape the institutions of modernity. In this process the self is not a passive entity, determined by external influences as, 'in forging their self-identities, no matter how local their specific contexts of action, individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in their consequences and implications' (1991, Introduction). The development of the self is an active and transformative process.

He posits that the doubt that is caused by disembeddedness by which he means ‘the “lifting out” of social relations from local contexts and their rearticulation across indefinite tracts of time-space’ (1991, Chapter One) is: ‘not only disturbing to philosophers but is *existentially troubling* (original emphasis) for ordinary individuals’ (1991, Chapter One). He claims that all modern individuals work to develop a framework of ontological security of some sort, based on routines of various forms. He defines this ontological security as ‘the possession of “answers” to fundamental existential questions which all human life in some way addresses’ (1991, Chapter Two), and defines self-identity as ‘not something that is just given, as a result of the continuities of the individual’s action-system, but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual’ (1991, Chapter Two). Pagans are individuals who are reflexively reordering their understanding of themselves in relation to the swiftly changing world around them and actively creating a sense of self that is intimately connected to place as a means of focusing their existence and establishing ontological security.

As Pagans are involved in developing an identity of self and place, it is also a self that is intimately connected to community and cultural imagining. Hall (2013) argues that identities are the names that people give to the different ways that they are positioned by or position themselves within narratives of the past. He identifies two ways of considering cultural identity. The first frames it in terms of a shared culture, engaged in by those who have a history and an ancestry that they share in common. He posits that this viewpoint is a powerful one in newly emerging representations of marginalised peoples, and argues that such representations, lending an imaginary coherence to experiences of diaspora and fragmentation, are less a rediscovery of identity than a production of it.

The second view of cultural identity considers that there are critical areas of difference and discontinuity as identity is not fixed, but 'is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth' (2013, p. 395). From this viewpoint cultural identities are a positioning rather than an essence, a matter of becoming as well as of being. We should consider common history as a unification across differences, rather than view it as a common origin, as it is an ever-moving translation that encompasses difference, rather than a fixed position.

An initial reading of Paganism might site it within Hall's first viewpoint of cultural identity – the idea of a shared culture with a shared history and ancestry, and possibly some practitioners regard their religion in these terms. The second view is the more powerful in giving explanation to what is occurring for Pagans. Their shared imaginings of histories and myth enable a framework of commonality for the religion, but each person brings to it an individual conception, forged from his/her own experiences. Within this religion Pagans can find 'home' because each can recognise their own particular home, forged from their personal imaginings in engagement with their personal experiences. Belonging to an imagined place is part of a process of constructing an identity of place. Their home is their own identity and this makes it recognisable.

### **Communities of comradeship**

Muir and Wetherall (2010) discuss the importance of identity in contemporary Britain, and survey some of the important identity trends that have emerged, arguing that although family life may have become less central for many people, other relationships have developed to replace it. They discuss the rise of friendship groups as places of support, community and collective identity. In relation to Paganism, moots and

gatherings are places where such friendship groups can be seen in operation, where people of varying ages and genders, often from different areas of the country, who might not otherwise be placed together, are to be seen hugging, back-slapping and calling greetings to one another. A young television producer who is London-based may sit having a pint with an older woman who is a vicar's wife from the midlands, while an older man with long hair and beard may be laughing over a shared joke with a young woman in Goth clothing. What connects these people is a sense of kinship based on shared values and conceptions, a mutual understanding of who they are.

At a conference, ME, giving a talk about herb usage, stated how happy she was to be talking to Druids because she was: 'With my family. With my tribe.' The main thrust of her talk was that:

We need to get back to the land and the plants that live on it and share that knowledge. Just as the ancient Celts lived in harmony with nature we can do the same.

She was conflating the ancient Celts, with her family and her tribe.

Philip Carr-Gomm, the Chosen Chief of OBOD, gives a more developed version of this kind of thinking:

So there you have the most amazing thing happening – the spiritual tradition of the Druids and Ovates as embodied in the Bards and their tales, is taught for over a thousand years, in modified and Christianized form in the Bardic schools. By the time the last of these schools closed its doors, the old tales were well and truly embedded in the collective mind – in folklore and in the popular imagination. The very landscape of Ireland and the British Isles is steeped in these tales, and all we need to do, to connect once again with their power and the teachings that they convey, is to journey into the land and listen to these old stories once again (Carr-Gomm 2002c, p. 14).

The development of a self-identity that is of place, forged from a network of connections found in specific imagined histories, substantive myth stories and indigenous fantasy literature is the key integrating feature in understanding Paganism as an emerging religion. It is developing as a modern response to the tensions that lie between the local and the global. For these practitioners identity of place stimulates communities of comradeship.

## **Conclusions**

For Paganism I offer a definition of enchantment as a nuanced experience stimulated by the feeling of wonder towards something larger and more meaningful than the individual self. This larger thing in their imagining is a place of the bounded and the boundless. It is a territory of belonging and a multi-dimensional arena of acceptance in which other-than-humans are also those that belong. It is powerful enough to cause individuals to form communities of comradeship. Theories of nationalism that consider the nation as a modern objective model in which belonging is forged within the disenchanted arena of the nation-state may struggle to explain the powerful sentiment that accompanies a sense of belonging to place that can cause individuals to offer their lives in sacrifice for it. I posit that an examination of Paganism opens a viewpoint on an enchanted sense of belonging to place as a sacred space, which reveals another dimension of understanding in terms of discussion of the powerfulness of nationalist sentiment. It is a gentler sense of connection, belonging and community that is not sourced in disregard for Other but rather is an individual framing of connection that seeks both to belong and to give regard to other connections to the whole.

Location and belonging are important elements in this religion of the modern world. It is a religion that reflects a need to establish a coherent sense of self in a world that is both sacred and profane, rational and imaginative, bounded and boundless.

## Chapter Eleven: Conclusions

In this thesis I have constructed an argument that was initiated by the comment that contemporary British Pagans often make of ‘coming home’ to this religion. In consideration of what stimulated this expression of recognition and security I initially hypothesised that elements to be found in popular culture may parallel those themes in Paganism that are considered of importance and that those elements are drawn together into a framework that Pagans recognise as their religion. As a Pagan practitioner myself I considered that the work of fantasy author Alan Garner resonated with my religious understanding and began to examine his work to try to isolate what those similar themes might be. Having isolated themes of place, liminality, the use of substantive myth stories, an interest in fantasy stories based in real place, especially in Britain, (categorised by Attebury [1992] as *indigenous* fantasy), a belief in the ontological reality of magic, and an animist understanding of personhood for other-than-human beings, I considered what it was that integrated these separate themes to make them of importance within Paganism.

My analysis of the data gathered has led to the argument that the use of the imagination in constructing a sense of place is key in understanding this religion. I have argued that Pagans are imagining a place they often refer to as Albion: a multi-dimensional arena pinned, in the primary world, in Britain. Imagined Albion as a place creates the security of boundaries, but is simultaneously a boundless place forged through its multi-dimensionality. Pagan understandings of this multi-dimensional arena are constructed through the use of imagined histories based in pre-Christian Britain – those of the Anglo-Saxons, the Vikings and the Celts. These histories endow a past to the religion. Imagining a past from which the religion is sourced allows for

appreciations of continuity and posterity to form, providing a meaningfulness of identity for practitioners. Using a folkloristic framework, I have argued that the chosen substantive myths represent significant stories of place and community for Pagans. I have further argued that fantasy texts are a place in themselves and that they also offer unbounded space for exploration of ideas beyond those represented in mimetic texts. Enchantment is sourced for Pagans somewhere in the space between the bounded and the boundless.

An ethereal relationship lies at the centre of each of the arguments made in the preceding chapters, in relation to understanding Paganism. This relationship is that between the bounded and the boundless. It may be seen in the tensions between the local and the global, between rationalist understandings and the imagination, between the profane and the sacred, between the use of substantive myth as place and fantasy texts as liminal space, within fantasy texts as both place and space, between belonging to a nation-state and having feelings of indigenous connection to place. Within and stemming from this complex relationship arises enchantment.

In imagining Albion as both bounded by the stories, histories and geographical outlines of Britain, and also as a space of the boundless represented by secondary dimensions of the supernatural and the magical, connections with the ancestors, the folding nature of time, and the recognition of the personhood of other-than-humans, Pagans are attempting to make sense of their identities both in the disenchanted world of primary experience and in the enchanted arena of the boundless. Their identities of self are constructed within an imagined cultural identity of place and space, pinned down by the coordinates of Britain in the primary world.

Recognition of this complex understanding of dimensionality and networks leads to the argument that Paganism is a modern religion if we consider Latour's (1993)



argument that a redefinition of the word modern acknowledges the existence of such hybridities of understanding. Modernity contains within it a constant questing for and developing understanding of itself and my positioning of Paganism therefore can only represent a snapshot at this current time. Modernity is involved in a process of constant development, a process which holds connotations of growth and change without necessarily implying movement forward through a linear progression of time. I position the development of Paganism as a nested modern religion within a developing modernity. It is plural in itself and establishing itself within and alongside other pluralities as part of the wider society of modern Britain. It may be imagining the past, but it is doing it as part of the present mode of thinking. It remains fluid and flexing in its self-awareness and positioning. It is a religion forged through continual process and it rejects fixity. One of the underlying intentions of Paganism is to forge a religion based in an imagined space of combination. Within this imagined space there lies the potential for wonder, and for the mundane, as both are accepted and acceptable in a place that is created as a point of convergence for all states of being. Shared narratives shape the imagining of Albion as a place of magic, connected to Otherworld(s), a place that is simultaneously time-bound and timeless. The power of imagination is the thrust of Pagan use of myth stories and fantasy texts.

I have offered a response to Bruce's (2002, p. 89) call for academic analysis as to why it is mainly white people that get involved in New Age practices, utilising Paganism as a case study to offer an explanation that it is the particular cultural identity that Paganism is engaged in developing, steeped in imaginings of connection to particular pre-Christian histories in Britain, that might seem exclusionary for those that may imagine their cultural histories differently. I have offered as a response to Anderson's (2006) questioning of what it is that theories of the disenchanted nation-

state are unable to make account for – the willingness of millions of people to sacrifice self in the name of a nation. I do so, by offering a definition of enchantment as the sense of awe that is generated in a person by the presence of something larger and more meaningful than the individual self, and have extended this to encompass enchantment of place and belonging. The enchantment of belonging to place and community is a powerful drive within Paganism.

### **Final thoughts**

Why do Pagans ‘come home?’ Shared understandings framed through public and private engagements with place, magic, myth, fantasy texts, and animist understanding of other-than-humans lead to the creation of communities of comradeship. Individuals utilise these shared understandings to construct an individual vision of Albion that is personal to them. Images, ideas and conceptions found in popular culture and that form part of the fantastic milieu (Kirby, 2013) have contributed to their shared understandings and individual conceptualisations, so that when they ‘find’ this religion they recognise it as ‘home’, at once a place of security and a space for enchantment. They see imagined Albion as an enchanted landscape that can be related to in a way that is not a simple nationalism but is a feeling of indigenous belonging in the sense of being a place to which one is naturally tied. Pagans are presenting a self-understanding that orients, and relates them to a particular place (Johnson, 2005). This is a new form of conceptualising what belonging might be. Paganism represents an example of a phenomenon that can be examined more widely. It is a way of being both enchanted and modern. It is a way in which Pagans can self-authenticate their own experience by moving from self-conscious creation into actual practice.

Paganism in Britain is a forming of religiosity that is imaginatively developing such conceptions from a desire to actively express such an ideology. In this way Pagans are forging an identity that expresses belonging to locality, but are identifying themselves with a larger principle: that of the whole earth.

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## Appendix A

Pc Andrew Pardy of Hertfordshire Constabulary said:

In my home force of Hertfordshire Constabulary I am also an Equality and Diversity (E&D) representative alongside my role as a police constable. As an E&D rep I was involved in numerous projects that sought to expand the support for police staff and the community that came into contact with us. I assisted the force in expanding the existing (predominantly Christian and Catholic) police chaplaincy to include Hindu, Pagan, Buddhist and even Humanist chaplains. I had always been an open and vocal Pagan at work and, alongside the inclusion of Pagan chaplains, Hertfordshire Constabulary had already allowed me to change my Bank Holidays to accommodate the Pagan calendar, rather than the Gregorian, and had also included a short informative article that I had written upon request on their E&D faith pages on the force intranet.

It wasn't long before a handful of Pagan officers approached me; we started meeting regularly, and I approached the Chief Officers and requested permission to set up a support and social group for Pagan police officers and staff in Hertfordshire. I had to create a Business Plan, a constitution and a service level agreement – of which I had no experience; once these had been agreed a local PPA was established. It wasn't long before I was approached in relation to Pagan related policing issues on a regular basis.

In contrast to the positive and supportive stance that I had encountered, a few friends in the Metropolitan Police were encountering a vehemently negative and obstructive attitude towards their efforts. Their catalyst was an in-house E&D training package that had described Paganism as a New Age religion and had included several other inaccuracies. When the relevant department was approached about the package they withdrew it completely rather than correct it. Seeing that the force obviously needed an approachable information source that also represented and protected the interests of their Pagan police officers and staff, a significantly sized group approached a high-ranking executive officer and requested permission to set up a support and social group within the Metropolitan Police.

Their request was flatly denied. By this time I had established a local PPA in Hertfordshire and had started meeting regularly with Pagan groups in the area. My wife, Charlotte, had joined as one of two Pagan chaplains, and a Druid friend the other; I was also invited to the senior E&D board meetings with executive officers to provide updates on what had been achieved or highlighted in the previous month. I had been contacted by Pagan police officers and staff from across the world and had already started attracting media interest.

It wasn't long before Charlotte and I were invited to meet with the now disillusioned Metropolitan officers to assist them. It was at this meeting that I put forward the idea of a National Police Pagan Association – the reasoning being that an official DSSA required the endorsement and support of the Home Office, the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), and not the permission of senior officers at local level who may obstruct progress due to personal agendas and prejudice. By adopting a national model the Metropolitan officers could effectively bypass the senior officer who was denying them their right to represent themselves and become a part of a DSSA that was effectively bigger than any one individual constabulary – this would also allow officers and staff from any constabulary regardless of size and Pagan demographic to join and receive the support and information that we could provide.

This idea was agreed upon unanimously; at that meeting I created and led a working group with an aim to approaching the Home Office to seek advice and support throughout the bureaucratic process of becoming an endorsed national DSSA. The process took just over a year to progress due to a number of obstacles. Our application to become a DSSA could not have come at a worse time – the economy had started to fail and, as a result many government departments were suffering budget cuts, staff changes, redundancies and significant changes to their internal structure, designated responsibilities and business models. This meant that we were passed between several agencies who could not agree as to whom had the responsibility for DSSAs, and that communication with a member of staff was inconsistent as they would often have been moved on, transferred or made redundant. Another obstacle was that every person we approached

assumed that we were also after funding (which was not the case) and met us with an initial defensiveness that thwarted our attempts at effective communication regularly.

However, the primary obstruction was a severe misunderstanding of Paganism, and an assumption that there were not enough Pagans in the UK police service to justify the creation of a relevant DSSA.

I spent most of the initial 18 months drafting an initial Business Plan and Constitution; we had also set up our first PPA Executive Committee from officers from within the Metropolitan Police, Hertfordshire Constabulary, and other officers and staff from a handful of other police forces who had joined our efforts. We met repeatedly with the Home Office and NPIA throughout time, and were regularly set new tasks and sent away again – it was very difficult to stay motivated in the face of bureaucracy, lack of knowledge and an ever-worsening economy – at this point all of the work was carried out in my spare time, alongside working my usual shifts.

Eventually, I changed my approach slightly. I wrote to the Human Resources department of every constabulary in the UK and associated islands asking if they recorded the faith of their staff upon appointment and, if they did so, whether Paganism was included in that recorded data, and if so whether they could tell me how many Pagan officers and staff they employed.

I also started promoting the PPA among local and national Pagan groups and asked what they would expect from the PPA. I also started collating evidence that showed how Paganism was misunderstood and misrepresented in today's society. By this time we had set up a rudimentary website and I had been already been contacted and lampooned in media internationally.

It was during this work that the external aspect of the PPA started taking shape; it was clear from the abundance of media coverage that the PPA and I had already attracted that Paganism was regularly misunderstood and misrepresented in the public domain – however, many aspects that had accompanied my journey to date, the evidence was twofold. Whilst a majority of the articles were misinformed and, in some cases, downright insulting, a small number of articles supported us and promoted the PPA in

a positive light. Alongside this the public response to the articles were overwhelmingly positive.

As well as articles directly linked to the PPA I also sought out historical articles which showed that Paganism was misunderstood and misrepresented within the police service; these articles contained assumption and comments made by police officers and representatives in the public domain that would have caused outcry had they been made in relation to other faiths.

With the information that I had gathered I was able to create a Business Plan which contained evidence that Paganism was a significant faith in the UK by including census information, that there was a significant number of Pagan police officers and staff in a significant number of constabularies in the UK, that the public opinion was that the police service did not understand Paganism, and lots of examples of how Paganism was misunderstood and misrepresented in society. The Business Plan was formed of two significant strands – one being the support of Pagan police officers and staff within the police service in relation to bullying, freedom of expression and Pagan holidays, and the other being the support for the Pagan aspects of society who come into contact with the police, whether as an offender, victim, or witness, in relation to ensuring that their rights are upheld and that their Pagan beliefs are accounted for and, where appropriate accommodated effectively.

After nearly two years of hard work the PPA which, by this time, had already attracted a significant membership, was accepted as a DSSA by the Home Office and the NPJA – once we had confirmed that we required no funding. The next significant hurdle was effectively promoting the PPA and introducing it into each of the UK constabularies. Whilst it was embraced by some, others stated that they saw no reason to incorporate the PPA into their existing Staff Support Networks, not fully recognising that the PPA was a national DSSA. We continued to meet and promote ourselves where possible, despite the resistance of some constabularies and general slow progress.

At our first official AGM in 2010 I was voted in as the Chair of the PPA; a full Executive Committee was also established, with members from six

different forces; by this time we had members in 17 different constabularies, including the Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI). With the assistance of the committee I was able to establish a membership constitution, clearly define the roles of those within the committee, and promote the PPA effectively in the media as an official representative with an established public message.

By this time I was regularly being invited to and attending national meetings concerning DSSAs and E&D issues within the police service. As a result of my interactions and networking at these events I was invited to represent the PPA and the ACPO Equality, Diversity and Human Rights (EDHR) stakeholder meetings – meaning that the PPA was now able to present the Pagan perspective in relation to policing, law and policy at a national level. However, endorsement as a DSSA recognised by ACPO brought with it new complications; I was tasked with writing a new Business Plan that incorporated the current national EDHR Strategy for the Police Service, the Equality Standard for the Police Service, the Home Office Strategy 2008-2011, The Equality Act 2010, and the Policing Pledge – each of which I had to study and understand before incorporating them. Alongside this issue the government had recently decided to withdraw all funding for DSSAs, meaning that many were having to significantly change their structure and the services that they provided. Whilst this aspect did not affect the PPA overly (as we had never received government funding) we were seen as an example of what other DSSAs should be aiming for – a self-reliant DSSA with a clearly defined constitution lead by a central Executive Committee. As such the PPA was the first DSSA to create a Business Plan under the new ACPO guidelines – a steep learning curve for me.

In line with the new Business Plan the Aims and Objectives of the PPA evolved; as well as supporting Pagan police officers and staff and improving the relationship between the Pagan community and the police service, the PPA now had an additional duty as a ‘critical friend’ to various government agencies, and was expected to deliver strategic objectives and the national policing vision. This significant increase in responsibility and workload meant that my Service Level Agreement with Hertfordshire



Constabulary was amended to allow me more work hours for PPA related work.

Endorsement by ACPO also brought with it a higher level of accountability and responsibility – the public image of the PPA reflected not only on us as individuals, but as members of the Pagan community, and members of the police service... In addition to the above issues I, as the public face of the PPA, have received death threats and hate mail.

As it stands I am currently working on establishing 'Initial Contact Officers' (ICO) in each force – including those with no PPA members – in line with the Business Plan requested by ACPO. This has brought with it new issues – in some areas existing PPA members are acting as ICOs for neighbouring forces, but in areas where there is no established membership or ICO non-Pagan staff are having to receive basic training in Paganism prior to accepting the role – it is a long, drawn out process, but so far that has been the norm!

Personally, I think that Paganism and Policing are two very emotive subjects and are sometimes perceived to be incompatible and, by combining them in a forum that directly affects the public, the PPA has attracted more than it's fair share of public scrutiny and opinion. I am sure that one day a Pagan police officer will be considered a usual and normal thing, and that the Pagan aspects of our community will be able to identify themselves as such without fear of misunderstanding or discrimination from the Police service.

Pc Dave Bullock – the treasurer of the PPA – outlined some of the more practical aspects of the work of the PPA:

There have been successes in terms of Forces making requests to Andy for information on issues involving persons within the Pagan community i.e. a judge not realising there was a Pagan oath when an officer read it out at court and was told that was a breach of the Oath Act – PPA offered advice through Andy's work with the Home Office. A juvenile taking a knife to school and claiming it was because he was Pagan – PPA offered advice that there was no such excuse. I recall another incident of someone being brought into custody in one Force and claiming he was Pagan and had

certain needs and then when seen and contacted by someone with PPA knowledge it was found that they weren't Pagan at all. Andy and I have worked on Pagan Sudden Death guidance and custody procedures for Pagans when brought into custody. The PPA also exists to dispel misconceptions about Pagans in general, I've presented to my own Diversity Unit on the matter to give a bit more information than people already know and to dispel those preconceived ideas. Of course the PPA is there to support Pagans joining the service and would welcome more officers from Pagan backgrounds applying. We are there for support and if any new applicant faced difficulties in joining and stigma attached to being Pagan then we would provide the support to see how that could be resolved.